

**KENYA,
Will You
Marry Me?**



Philo Ikonya

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Kenya, will you marry me?

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Prologue

My Bed of Thorns in Nairobi - June 2007

On my cell-phone the time is 3.00am. I am not holding a religion in my hand to check the hour, just a cell phone to orient me. This is a June morning and it is cold here. I turn in my bed and close my eyes. The map of Kenya appears first vaguely on my mind. It has no in-land features but this shape I see is definitely hers. Burning borders. Red inside. It is not the red of wine or even Christmas. We are not in celebration. Inside burning borders she is a deep reddish brown color; angry red. Coffee red. It is a red which disturbs my mind.

Where is the presence of verdant green to give me peace? Cold fear creeps up my skin. This is not a dream. Where is the blue of the lakes, rivers and ocean? I am frightened. It's not even in the sky. I am awake. But why should a map on my mind frighten me? I wonder. I realize that in these wee hours of the morning I am too anxious. I keep my eyes closed. I scanned my mind to see if perhaps some bad news was hidden in my memory the way something unpleasant hides in the mind before one fully wakes up. Something maybe from the past? Yes. Pita, a beloved brother, died in June some two decades ago and still I see him lying down bleeding in my mind. Suddenly, I ask myself, Is someone about to kill my country? Is there some hard news awaiting me I wonder then, was this is it? The image makes me restless how a poisonous snake you cannot get away from would disturb. How was I to keep focused with this on my mind? I was not afraid, but the whole experience seemed to touch my skin making me feel cold. It was closing up something in me. I had to find help.

Fumbling in the dark, my hand touches my blue shining beads near my bed. I grab them even as I wonder what these beads mean to me. I feel one bead. It is the bead of a rosary. It is like stroking the shaven head of a tiny Buddha figure. Then, in my mind all is clear now. I now see men enrobed in white long dresses. I see women with heads uncovered and with heads covered. They are mostly dressed in black. They are carrying beads in their hands and praying. The sound I hear says peace unto me. I answer as I was taught; 'and also with you' 'alei kum salaam!' I hear the rhyme in the words.... 'kum salaam' and 'tecum.' I wait for the picture to change in the way that mental images morph. It does not. Something destroys any hopes of all the people praying hearing themselves.

My mind and spirit gather into one strong ball of goodness still, inside. It is uncomfortable but I am searching for both land and sky. I need inspiration not visions of desperation. I reach out. It is a big bead of many colors this bead, and the most beautiful color on it is black. It is a black a few people have seen on earth. So beautiful that the people of the world who look at it lovingly become black. There is a warm and tender movement in my heart. It is a spiritual movement without words. I now see the blue Indian Ocean, return on the map. It is the same color of my beads which I still have in my fingers. I begin to see the first drop of Lake Turkana, Sango Lake (Victoria), Lake Nakuru and Lake Naivasha. Elementeita and Chala, I see too. The blue of the water brings me calmness. The lively green returns the way green grass grows in a movie. Blade after blade pops out and dots the screen till the whole field is green. All that life dies again. I see the reddish brown map return. I am tired. I cry, but I must work, the bead inside urges me to.

I wait for the map in my mind to change as people walking on it chant for peace in many languages on their beads. It is clear it will not change. Is that what my prayer is worth? This remains Kenya. She is clearly the one. My country hugged by pain in every grain of sand, and some of the grains, are soaked in blood. How would crops grow? The map stuck in me. I am her soil and she is me. I change soft clothes for tough ones. I get some hard words and stare at them. Action: No to passivity. Choices: Only one option. Inspiration: No to desperation. The Now: the soul of our history, alive today. Recipe for peace: Change. Hard work for flour, hard words for water, truth for oil.

Here is Kenya. She turns to me denuded and red; naked. My country is stripped of all that is green and good. Is this what happened to her neighbors in the north above before violence swallowed them? There is no one in the buildings here to answer me. No rivers are here. Valleys are dry. Kenya, here she is before my eyes, red and hurting. This is frightening, but it is not all. Fire orange and bright is flowing in from outside borders in the north and when it gets to her borders, it goes underneath. The impression that under there it is hotter than a thousand boilers is in the soil of my soul. The borders are now gulleys that swallow fire. They do not digest it but pass it, injecting it under my beloved country. There is nothing in the news about all this.

I breath out peace. 'Asalaam aleikum Somalia! asalaam aleikum Sudan! Ethiopia and Egypt! I shudder to think of hot Kenyan bare soil heated from underneath. It would kill the east. I walk on the hot loose soil in the sun. It burns. I talk about it. I am determined. The blue must remain faithfully our umbrella, the only one we had when Grandma En and Grandma Em were

alive. The one the whole world has. Green must our grass be, even its humblest blade must live to give a ride to a small grasshopper. We will shelter our land and our people shall work in peace. I create to bring hope home to the Rift Valley, back to the north, the coast and the lakes- to the whole of our Kenya. I know that even if we forgot, we must have had an Afrikan myth that told us that in the beginning, we are all a story, a happy story.

I join in the dance. I must first tell you that my heart and head are in my feet because I learned to love change. My feet move fast for change.

My bare feet squelch into the rainy mud and it comes out squeezzy between my toes. Some of it hides in the inner part of my smallest toe. This mud in my village looks like thick liquid porridge, but with the reddish color of coffee.

But red soil here came from the violence of volcanic action. It was made when the earth was angry. I know she gets angry and I can soothe her. I also know some things she cannot stand and what makes her very angry, bloodshed. I have to walk on her and so I beg my feet to speak to her for peace. My story and my love for Kenya, come from my heart, not from books.

Birth pangs

I did not know that a quarrel between people- who are not the father and mother of the fetus, can lead not just one, but many women to miscarry. I learned that one early morning when on the first day of August, 1982 Kenya woke up to news of a *coup d'état*. Some women were delivered of pre- mature babies upon hearing the news which were being announced by a national broadcaster taken hostage; and gunshots. Some of the children born then, arrived holding shock in their hands. Their mothers did not lactate. The sight of dead Kenyans lying on the street drank the milk of their breasts. I know of children who lived many days as if they would be shocked forever. After some years, when they went to school, these children were given free milk by the state. They were beneficiaries of a scheme in which under Moi and as a result of his directive, milk was given free to primary school children. The people feared the innocence of milk.

I then found out that history and politics live in homes. I did not know that politics is written on bed sheets, and not just on newsprint sheets of paper. I saw bloody blankets later, and no one sleeping in beds where couples were warm before. It was 2007, in Kenya. Kivuitu said Kibaki won the Election. Politics without any shame went between the sheets of beds where people used sheets. I saw it had been there before but hiding its head. Now it woke up and started being the third person in beds for two, and the main person in families. Where there were no sheets politics went into the water. Water lost its purity. Politics started oozing out of skins. Words lost clarity. Politics became blood. Blood seeped into the water. When the people looked at themselves in the mirror of water, they saw beasts. Wood became guns. Police uniform changed into tribal colors. People started fires. Air lost its colorlessness. People died. Others were rendered homeless, some were left crying in the valleys of

camps, deserted forever. I saw back in history how politics had been in my parents bed. I knew that each one would have to make change very personal. As personal and yet as community owned as how some of us organize our weddings. I began to make arrangements, for a possible marriage.

I did not know that the possibility of a rift between people in politics lived in every grain of sand, water and tree alive in the land. The potential to split lives in the possibility of uniting, like in the concept of a marriage. Splitting or uniting. Water of life or death. The possibility remains. I saw how division kills a country then. Joy was missed deeply. It is not true that we are born to mourn.

It is not true that people can take anything from anyone. It is true we are often cheated. Our history of resistance is stronger than such lies. In Afrika, our stories tell of how some little tricksters always beat big animals. This story is not over. Our continent's life is not a film with a beginning and an end. Display the credits on the sky. We have just begun. Do not drop the thread. The past is always here. Let me remind you that I come here with strength. It is important to be awake with eyes wide open and ears keen.

I heard the quarrel of lightening and thunder. It started with light and then became violent. I was working late. I heard a strange voice that night before I slept. It was a voice that went fast like light. It mocked me. It was Grandma En, lighting the way. It was also Grandma Em mumbling away. She was rolling thunder. 'What kind of suitor are you who starts to tell a village about birth pangs? What kind of suitor are you? You do not start by showing us your wealth? Do you not send emissaries before to announce you?'

Grandma En stormed in the thunder. She was lightning returning. She shut Grandma Em up. They used to cheat me that women did not know power. Grandma En sealed the noisy lips of thunder. She bade it to keep quiet and wait. She could stay, she is lightning. Then all grandmothers began to sing. Listen to the silence of inspiration. It commands those fast seconds between lightning and thunder and I am born. I am not shocked. I am born creating. Traditional arguments never sought to destroy. Modern ones do. Grandma En's inspiration is rather blunt. It is not always sweet music. "It is the pregnant woman who says when her pain begins to bite her, not her neighbor!" She yells at Grandma Em. Between them, I rise with my work. A third birth. A different type. A creation.

De Gado

I hold a thin dry maize cob. One by one I caress the cob removing the maize grain by grain. No maize is left. The cob is dry. The maize is for storage. The cob has come alive for me. It begins to talk to me. I listen. He listens too. I create. It is a person called De Gado. I knew him some years back. For many of us, he gets lost in the crowd that always walks everywhere we move, but not for me. I know him well and my mind has a special memory of him. I started listening to such people like De Gado in my mind, when I was three years old.

Are children children? I thought I was making dolls to play with then, but no. Little by little and much more along my life, over time, they became real people. They never left me. This always makes me very happy. To see our connection continued. We did not stop to be. We do not have a different word for life and being. Thunder and lightening cannot undo us. We are.

Let me return to De Gado. He is very skinny. He fights for freedom in his land, the land in his soul and the one he steps on. Long, long time ago, I knew De Gado's mother too. That was when I had a different concept of a week. Every minute felt so long in the never setting sun. De Gado's mother was a thin and clever woman.

De Gado, is also called *Maish* in Nairobi. He goes there for the first time in 1992, he does not know the city. He knows its name. He is only 10 then. His father belonged to the group of the unseen but fathering men. He did not see De Gado come to earth. He felt him coming in his dreams. De Gado belongs to the children who are known by the world because difficulties land them on the street fast. I know this because after I met him, his story started to daily unfold. His Grandfather was killed in Olenguroune. Grandpa, the father of De Gado's mother, is the one who used to keep his daughter balanced. His Grandfather supported his mother as long as he could. Now he was gone. De Gado's mother went her way to search for food by sleeping with any man who could give her a meal. De Gado, alone, boarded a bus to a place he never knew. People called it Nairobi. He heard strange stories about Nairobi. He knew how his Mother worked her body to feed him and he felt hurt.

De Gado knew how to pronounce the easy name Moi. To him it meant the one who has big hands and takes all, and gives out much of it, with big, big, hands. It meant to him, the one who determined how deep you can breathe, how much milk you can drink. The radio sang that he was glorious, *mtukufu*. De Gado heard this. He wondered as he saw no toilet to use anywhere, if the powerful man knew where one could go to the toilet. To stay alive one needs food and food includes water. But to stay alive, one also needs a toilet. The bush offers itself in the rural areas, what can it do? But in Nairobi, the city is waiting for you to unzip. With your trousers down it is easier to bribe than to speak rationally. I understand that, but I have never been able to hear the word 'bribe' without seeing 'tribe'. Vice like lice lives in families too. Both these words give me pain. Bribe and Tribe. Choose the ones who speak like you. Language. No one cared what De Gado's mother ate out there. She had no zip to her underwear. She spoke another language.

The pain of imagining his Mother prostrate for food, his Mother who was a fighter for freedom, long ago, was too much for De Gado. His Mother died soon after De Gado disappeared from her sight.

When he boarded the bus, the bus conductor did not charge him for he knew about many other young boys like him. When he reached the city, he lay on a pavement hungry. He was so hungry. He cried out, "*Mtukufu*... Glorious One... Moi!". But nobody heard his voice. It was swallowed by the din.

Baba Jimmi, a fat old man woke him up at 3am and told him to go and look for voters if he wanted food. What were voters, he wondered. 'You look for *kula*, get me *kura*!' Baba Jimmi yelled. De Gado cried. He was so hungry he was almost dead. He did not need a bush. He only had gas in his stomach. He did not know what votes and voters were. Children who had lived on the street for years heard him crying, '*Mtukuuu*... Glorious one, giver of milk... Moi!' as they slept on the statue of Kenyatta near the International Conference Center in Nairobi. The children rushed over to him. He could not even whisper his own name. They looked at him tenderly. They saw themselves in the past, the mirror of his eyes now so small and dark. The Children at once called him the thin and dying one- Skin-go. There was no such a thing as calling the police. Those would snuff him out. They gave him dirty bread and shared with him a secret. They hid him in a bin in a dump site for a week.

Police

Police arrest De Gado every time he opens his mouth inside the bin because they know that not only his face but his entire body is a demonstration in itself of their boss's failure. They have sworn to defend the powers of their boss. They said he called out in his sleep in the bin. That he shouted '*baki!*' '*baki!*' which means, '*Justice! Justice!*' To be so skinny and unfed and talk about justice is dangerous. One is meant to die.

The other day angry police arrested De Gado when the street children formed what they called a train of hunger. The police said it was a demonstration. The heads of the police were covered with black helmets. In the van they threw him in, there was a moment for a quick conversation. He told them he was only a maize cob. And that since Moi had gone, beaten by Matiba, he should have grown fatter. Some laughed. Matiba, he was told, lost. De Gado was under arrest. They said he was in an illegal assembly of maize cobs made by a crazy woman. They also said it is written in Inside Occurrence Books that a cob is never small. They said again and again that it can bring down to the ground a fat man, a man as big as an elephant. When they said this, they saw their boss falling to the ground and screaming. In their hearts they laughed, but outwardly, their fingers moved the trigger and shot a million times.

The street children sent De Gado a coded message. They coached him on how to behave in there, telling him never to mention Moi. In the city, they told him, Moi gave invisible canes even to adults like the mad teachers in school. They said Kenyatta had caned Moi and Moi was caning the people. Moi was a school Headmaster before. A journalist from Europe called him 'The Statesman'. At the beginning, we copied this. We did it in the holy land of of our school where Moi gave the Catholics soil next to a slum free of charge. They told him it was for the greater good of society. He smiled. '*Kumbe*, even these ones have mouths with which to eat?' he mused. The street children sent out a secret code to other mouths. Back to De Gado.

The police told De Gado that he had broken law and order for asking why food was so expensive and why maize was not available.

We are here now, looking for De Gado in the cells. We are here, also hungry. We sing our songs of resistance. He will come out with others he spoke to about maize in the cells. They will all be stronger in spirit. The cells of pain are also nurseries of revolutions.

Secret

Many years later, De Gado is still holding the secret in his head. He has passed it on so silently and secretly to others. He can pass it on in a look. He knows the village singer knows it too. He can pass it on in a wink. He can pass it on in a smile. He does it in silence. He can pass it on in a word. In a story. He can pass it on even in bags of bad gas. He has passed on the shared secret of all the dejected. Inspiration takes power from lightning and desperation is destroyed.

De Gado is going to court for mentions and hearings and he will be for some more years. If he sits with his friends at Jeevanjee Gardens in Nairobi or anywhere in Kenya today, they will arrest him. They will hold him for hours. They will laugh at him and call him a maize cob many times. They will break his ribs. After that they will taunt him asking him who thinks he is. He now chooses to sit with us in the rural places where we tell stories. He does remember that is where we met when he was a maize cob. He returns where we recreate ourselves in stories.

He laughs when we tell the story of a grain of maize. The story of how one grain of maize jumped from a boiled maize cob Moi was eating for breakfast. The grain of maize spoke. It told Moi that it also had milk in it when it was young and that was before it was fed to imported cattle. The new cattle that did not go out to graze. The economist President -in -waiting clapped. He, said the teller, had spoken like Kenyatta. And that was to really speak, it almost became a proverb. De Gado loves this story. He promises to always defend maize. De Gado's mum used to turn off Kenyatta's speeches. He threw in the words which made parents uncomfortable. They said he was abusing the British. He was abusing the British.

Our home

I am often outside our house always staring at the bamboo patterns, I see how our house was made. Being so small, no one really bothers what I am doing or what I see. Dark fingers from long bare hands press small beige bamboo canes into a rectangle. Wet clay accepts the halved bamboo canes letting them sink in gently as if into soft chocolate mud. Nine of these rectangles make the front wall of the house with the door right in the middle. You can get in. I sit outside the neat house in the shade formed by the extensions of the corrugated iron sheets, as I often do near the back door. It is mid morning.

I come closer. A large piece of bamboo split in the middle goes through the center of the rectangle from corner to corner. The smaller pieces come out to the edges till they fill the rectangle. When the first out of nine rectangles are filled, the front wall symmetry looks magical to the eye. When all the box shapes are filled, the beige bamboo canes touch each other, the mud is no longer visible.

In my traditional home, the mud was covered before and smoothed out by soft gray clay, so between the clean bamboo sticks, if you see any substance, it will be whitish clay not red mud. The house looks great. With the passing of years; it leans and the red mud inside gets hard and caked, the clay on top layers off and drops. But it is early yet. I sit outside the neat house in the shade formed by the extensions of the corrugated iron sheets.

All the four walls are neatly fixed like this. There are windows on all four walls, and a front door which gives directly to the back door which faces the little kitchen made in the same way but separately. This is our house and home.

You know it. The only stone buildings I have seen all my life are the churches, banks and some bars. In the church, the priest says we have no real home on earth but in the sky and he spoils the love I have for the little crooked window in the wall in my parents' bedroom. I think my Father, Baba as we call him, pronouncing it with a soft sound for 'B' linking with 'f', listened to the priest too keenly on this one, he does not seem to be in a hurry to make a new house when this one ages.

Mami goes to the bank and sometimes takes me with her. She is a teacher. The bank is another stone building I have seen. I have also seen the famous bar that still smells of honey in Duberi. Here, I only passed by with Baba. When I am older, customs at the entrance of the bar hold me outside. Even when I want to be a leader, am safer not going in there. It is only the church that I am allowed to explore alone. The ceiling has golden color! It is all so well built! On my way from there, I see that the stones of the walls of the shopping center are almost like the ones of the church but they are crooked and will fall earlier.

My Home

I help pick up beans that strayed from Mami's wide sack mat. She opens small sacks and sews them together to make big mats to spread out beans and maize out in the sun. I have picked up enough escape beans to fill that green old tin cup that is always lying outside. The silence of a sunny morning is broken by clear whistling from the path near our house. I copy the whistling perfectly. The sound trails into the distance as the man disappears. Mami marvels at me. She can see I am not just a good parrot- *kasuku*. I am me, like my Grandma En. She says she knows. She blesses me. "That you may walk far, run, fly and create. People are words. People need homes. Some people are homes for other people like words for other words. Never send any word away," She said.

That happens long before I leave my village, before I have white shoes to step on red mud. Mami's beans and words are precious. I am going make houses for the body and for the mind with all the others. It is not good to have shelters without people or people without shelters.

I want to share my home. This is the lightning room. My Grandma En is urgently calling for change. I first met my Grandmother En in a house of many rooms not a hut. She had every pot of hers perfectly clean and hanging off its own nail, in its own spot in the wall near her fireplace. But I visited my grandmother in a hut later. She was evicted from her plot in Kangoya. I do not know the meaning of this name but they said it was a place for the poor. The reason they gave for her eviction, with some other people, was that they lived too near the cemetery. Cemetery land is grabbed because people forgot the traditional ears of the dead. They put her away far from her daughter in Gatuanyaga, where the ostrich used to cross freely with a proud gray skirt worn by both male and females and spread out in the wind and in the sun. That plot of land that was my Grandmother En's is now owned by rich people who bought it back after Granny's eviction. She became lightning. The people of Kangoya called me one time. They said I would know what they should do with their dumping problem. Their cemetery had been turned into a dump site. Granny's prediction has come true. They would eat us the poor and even deprive our bones of rest, they would eat us to the very bones! My Grandmother's new house in the land of ostriches then, was now a round hut with no rooms. It was much smaller. Today it is a grave on the foot of Kilimambogo. It is good to be alive for her now. It is not my own offering of life that I make. I do not tell stories for their sake. It is the word that I cannot imprison that goes flying even before I can run. It is the blessing of woman. I am offering my story so you may know where my deep love comes from. I want to tell Grandma Em that one proposes out of an undying love.

Work and offering

I pick up my old cup full of red beans. I lift it slowly past my heart with both hands, past my mouth steadily and up past my eyes. I lift it up slightly above my forehead, like the priest in my church lifts a golden cup that twinkles and shines and rings bells. My cup does not shine or ring bells. On the edges of my cup, the black smooth rim is only in bits, the rest is a rim of black jagged parts that can

cut. But the dark red beans at the top look big and healthy. I want to see the bottom of the cup. My brother Pita says that there is one dent that looks like a tiny map of Kenya there. I don't know what that should look like, but he knocks my head when he wants me to see things I do not see. I stare at the black patches at the bottom of the cup. I ask Mami, "Who hit this cup hard until the green color came out leaving black dents instead?"

Mami laughs a little and I know she means to cheer me up. She tells me that when I was even much smaller, I cried for days because of my little right finger was hurt. I held it out and showed it to everyone and asked if this was fair. Pita my elder brother had shut the door of our little wooden cupboard and caught my little finger! He was in a rush to get away when he heard Mami was coming and he would be caught feasting on her sugar meant only for tea. He had fitted himself into the cupboard and shut it. I did not know he was in there. My little finger was caught between the hinges. But after sometime, when it got cured, I really wanted to write. The tiniest finger takes all the weight under her when one writes with a pen. I began to delight in my little finger again, it could take work. Mami knew I would recreate Kenya and with love.

Our secret being

I made more dolls too for work. I thought I made them. I was wrong. When I was making them, they were making me in the mind. I remember with delight names of all the dolls I made with rags. I remember how they all came to life. We became one in the process. We do not fight. We are complete when one of us speaks. We are happy when we meet and look at each others faces without talking. We talk. I made De Gado with a dry maize cob. I have told you about De Gado. I remember the little leap of joy in my heart when the leg I made began to look like a real leg. I remember my suffering when I could not imagine how to make a foot. But I twisted small sticks, and then I thought I had real life in my hands.

Today, I am a grown-up. Dolls from lovely cloths are still here with me. They need to sit on my little arm chair at home and 'eat stories' and food. I need them. They are dolls with black hair and

skins. Lovely dolls dressed colorfully. Meet Savaiva. Savaiva does not have clothes on. She used to wear clothes before. Now, she ties a loose cloth over her shoulders. This loose cloth, is expected to cover her below the waist. Someone beat her up. Someone tore off her clothes. Did you hear the silence? Silence must be broken, this pain must break the the silence, like a flood breaks banks, and pours out.

Hariri is another doll. Her name means beauty. She wants to change her name to Nyanjiru. I told her about powerful Nyanjiru who fought colonialism, Nyanjiru who fought for freedom, can be her imaginary twin. Hariri and Nyanjiru are twins that can become one. Beautiful Black One. I tell her that all dolls and all of us are family. It works. She looks after De Gado whom she finds helpless on the street. Nyanjiru takes care of a race, a continent, and of De Gado too. De Gado learns to take care of an entire continent not an ethnic group. Nyanjiru and Hariri, they ask questions about many people: refugees, house arrest, rape and defilement. They are not shy. They speak out, with loudspeakers and without!

Nyanjiru, Hariri and Savaiva are eternal seekers of knowledge. They try to heal their pain and mine. They mock darkness. How to create a happy future is in their hands. I learned that in the happy dream that is childhood. I believed I flew. Some grown-ups remember that dream too. I have never believed I stopped flying. It was so enjoyable in the secret time when everyone says we are children. I learned how to fly on the wings of the imagination. I learned that in every instance taking the flight of creativity is wonderful. It has a gentle release which can confound the most calculating of politicians and powers, like it did my Mami who looked at me in awe!

I will share some of these secrets with all those who ask. I go back to when I was small many times. Beginnings hold a promise. We speak many times. These days we use our fingers to speak, someone will say we had always done so. But the mouth, the hands and even the ear have found key helpers in technology. Now the ear might ask the mouth for some of its energies. To stay here you need to be one who listens.

You are invited to have an open ear. The dolls and I, we are talking our own language that flies beyond words. It does not take time before we feel we are more brothers and sisters than we ever were before, even with people with whom we shared minds and

wombs. We tell each other the story of Kenya. Kenyalin loves it. We never get tired of talking about Kenya. We ask each other questions and we answer one another. Our story never ends. We are tasked to continue telling our story. The price of silence is death. We agree to live telling our story. If we do not share it we die. We talk about our relations. We talk about our rivers, lakes and mountains. We talk about our pains and joys.

We need to eat. De Gado is still so thin, his skin is like whitish dry leather. Would you like to touch him? Would you not if you met him, feel pain? Well, you will see he is just skin. You feel he is strong and you wonder why. You will notice he came from pain. Even if he has a secret within him he is yet to improve. You will hear and see his brilliance. Deep down you will know, he can do better than the big people who sit on him. Maybe it is not for nothing that he is a descendant of a maize cob that many say can fell a giant!

I sit outside our family's admired mud and bamboo house in a village near Nairobi (bee) but which I knew then as *Nairofii*. Eh? Meet more of us. Nyakairu is here in my hands. She is a child of Nyanjiru. Their names mean of the Black. Njiru like Kairu is black. The big one with the "N" and the small one with "K". 'Nya' means 'of the' in more than one language we speak. It includes a sense of belonging, being able and resisting all tressed in one. Women here are black, able and resisting. Nyanjiru was not only all of them, but she also passed that power on to her child through the milk of her breast and her sweat. She passed them on to De Gado before she left the earth. So, she never really left. She and Grandma En became lightning that takes over even after the thunders have gone. They come from a place where one can see lightning silently lighting up the sky a thousand times in one night, without thunder. They have seen that on the Ngong Hills. These are women we can dream with. They make our dreams.

That doll there is called Jogu, meaning elephant; short and fat. The other one is called Nyaga- it reminds me of the ostrich that made me run at Grandma En's place. Oko and Ang' are the other dolls. I have many. Ah, here is Kenyalin, the one who makes us feel one! Gige too is here. There is Eboni, another amazing beauty like Hariri. Eboni is tall, dark and thin faced, her smile opens up other

peoples' smiles. She fights for freedom for her land. I love her. You know Savaiva. Eboni is so much like you. You know her in yourself. She sings such long songs she is often speechless.

Breaking chains

All these people sing for De Gado's fetters to fall with the oppressor. They all sing. When De Gado is free, they too will be liberated. I hear their voices and am happy. They sing the highest soprano, better base, alto, tenor and other tones that play with all these voices. I tell them long, long stories. But in reality, it is not me who is speaking all the time. These stories, they also told me as I told them. In the telling of a story we do not draw a line between the teller and the told. We commune in our speech. This means that sometimes when we speak, they finish off my words. Sometimes they do that with deep silence. How do they finish off my words? It is not that they take them away from me. No. How do they finish off my words? That is hard for me to show you in this language you are reading now. It is part of the secret discourse that makes us one at home in Afrika. In conversations, the mark that the other listens is that they finish expressing a thought you began. In other lands, many call that a rude interruption but where we are, the finisher is invited slowly not only by the tone but also by just giving way for the other to take over. If one is found unable to finish the conversation, one is brought back on a summary. One learns to keep checking their listening this way. We partake. We have our lips together in speech even if we might not kiss them. There is a kiss that seals your lips.

Gige is that doll you are looking at now. I said 'Gi' as in the word 'give', not 'Ge' as in 'get'. Gige is that doll you are looking at now. Learn how to pronounce it in case you should meet him when you are on your own. I chose the name Gige for this doll because of its light sound which I love since I was a little girl. It told me it had an interesting meaning. Meanings sometimes speak before sounds. I heard that in the chirruping of birds happily eating together.

Later, I ask Mami what Gige means. Mami tells me that it is a beautiful name because it is the name for locusts. Mami says my doll Gige is as pretty as a locust's petticoat. When the locusts come

and eat all the green leaves, they fly around and show off their dainty slips. Beneath their heavy brown great coats you can see that fine cream petticoat inside. Why, it could even pass for silk. I ask why it is only men who are named Gige. I am told that all locusts, both male and female wear petticoats. Some people fear these questions. But they will not fear if they look at nature. Locusts fly all around like choppers in the sun: Drriiiii, driiiii, drriiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii! And off they drift.

Mami winks at me and says that their beauty has another side to it, like all beauty. I am warned that locusts are not as wonderful as I think especially when they invade in swarms and leave nothing green half an hour after landing. They take to other lands our green, eating into the flag if they can find it. They are devastating visitors. They eat up all the leaves and the plants die. It is a tragedy when they land on maize. They, like politicians leave the people starving and fly off with the flag! It is long since locusts did that. It is human beings who are doing it. Then just as well only men are named after locusts in my village! May be in other places women are like locusts and are named after them for their power and flight.

Hariri, she is as thin as De Gado. I feel her body with my fingers. She says she is thirsty. I feed her and dip her in warm water. I remove her mud. Kenyalin is not fine but she jumps from place to place looking for food for herself and for others always with Achieng'. They smile. Kenyalin likes telling people that she was not only looking for maize to eat, sit and grow fat, but that for the food of reason she wanted seasoned beans. She looks at things close and things far, far way.

We, I and all the dolls and you, cannot wait to hear our stories and questions. You cannot wait for our outpourings! We inspire each other all the time. This secret you can become part of. Before we start, let me tell you that there is something special about Kenyalin. She is very powerful because her making never ends or stops and she begun making me as soon as I made her. We are in this joyous relationship. She is growing strong and she has room for all of us. She has had a hand in the making of many other dolls. Sometimes she asks me very short and tough questions. She allows me only short and melodic answers. But she wants us all to speak at length this time. She knows that all the people are hungry for beans of justice and *ugali* made of the fine flour of the grain of wonderful

brains, of our reason. We are not cannibals. Kenyalin knows that all people are different in their hunger and needs. Not all the people of the land are as thin as De Gado and Hariri who is so beautiful. They are not all so thin, but they are not fat. Savaiva is skinny. The fat ones of the country are few. White solid fat is bursting out of their black skins.

Kenyalin asks Hariri, "Where do these fat ones get their extras in things: both toy cars and real, both milk and honey, both meat and vegetables, water, fruits and good beer, herbs and best medicine? Why do they have it all?" Hariri searches her beautiful head for a long time for an answer.

The rest of us, Kenyalin says, live on scraps. If you have beans, you cannot have maize and if you have fish, you do without flour. If you have fruits you can forget about flowers, which they export with all our water. Also real planes they own, not imitations like Gige and I who fly. They export our greens still marked with the labor of our hands; produce of Kenya, and still call us stupid- *Pumbavu!* They sign contracts on our behalf, and agreements which we have not read in our own languages, and then rule from unwritten laws.

Hariri and Eboni still wear their traditional make up and jewelry as well as modern. They pick what is best for each day and each dress they have. Most of the times, of course, they do not wear any make-up. They feel as naturally well made up as the gentle gazelles in the wild are. Before we end this story, and begin another one, they give Savaiva some clothes.

I forgot to tell you. I made Pamoja long, long ago. She keeps all our history close to heart and always tells it to her younger brother Umoja and his friends. When she speaks, all the girls gather around her long pleated skirt that spreads out on the ground so that they can all sit down. She is the pillar that stands in a skirt but who the skirt honors in its round wide shape, like a home. She is a griot who does not only recite history; she tells people what signs of trouble to watch out for. She is not the only seer in the village. One of her stories is about how women see. She says that women have to sight many, many moons in different shapes and forms. The world does not understand them easily for women will say just what they see in the smallest crescent of the tiniest moon. Men like these women are rare. Now you have met many of us, but do not worry. We are

easy people. You are one with us. Together, we are of many colors and we like how we look: tar, chocolate, café au lait, black, ripe mango color and tea au lait and even white like milk. Baba brought me a brand new Caucasian doll from *Nairobi*. I did not remember giving it a name. It could eat and drink and cry. We were all amazed. Maybe he got it as a gift, maybe he bought her in a shop. Everyone in the family and some in the village talked about the doll and how wonderful she looked with long blonde eyelashes that fluttered over her beautiful blue eyes. Differences should fascinate.

“How did she go to the toilet?” became a common question. As if it could be any different, except of course in a doll that has no life. All ours do. The question was a good one in the village. The Caucasian doll one day asked a question. It was about her mother’s nipples. She asked if she had just seen them on De Gado’s mother. Same darkness. She wanted warm milk. The same milk. We were happy she did not ask that same old tired question, “Oh, why are the palms of our hands and the soles of our feet the same color?” Did you think that some peoples blood was really blue and others white? I get tired of this story. It nearly tore Kenya apart when she was young in 1962. It wanted us apart and separated by color of skin. We somehow beat it. De Gado asks if we really did or if we just pretended to. I did not expect that our children still had to deal with it both at home and abroad. It is so strange a distraction. It is too old fashioned.

My Caucasian doll. Baba brought her here. Her heart is in the right place in the red, red mud. At the beginning, her feet suffered just like all ours. She is proud of this land. She decides to be one more. She chooses the name Nyakairu. The villagers quickly tell her they accept her as Nyarloka and that is her name. It means the one who comes from far, abroad.

They say in her land, she dances in the air like snowflakes wafting, like the angels that have no color. Painlessly. Bonelessly. But she talked about ballerina’s special health problems. She told us how people fall on the ice that comes after the snow. She told us about black snow and dog shit hiding in there till spring. When she saw Eboni, Hariri, Gige, De Gado and all the other dolls she could not believe it. She saw them dancing. They danced, she said, like black angels. At massage time, no muscle spoke about color.

Nyarloka is the one from abroad where snow falls everywhere, making village and city roof houses look as if white coconut has been pasted on them magically. Houses that in pictures look edible like the inside of coconut. The silence of thick snow which can stop all stories, she talked about. She told us she had lit many fires which had stolen the stories and stacked them high up in the chimneys. She told us about Christmas gifts and cards. Remember that Christmas card with shining speckles of gold dust, the one I saw in the church and touched it with my fingers which had red mud?

When I was small my dolls were small too. Now I am big and people are not dolls; they marry what and whom they want. I do not refuse to woo them to marry Change. Together, married in mind, we have always been better than scattered. We have been stronger together even if we spoke different tongues and we were so different.

Light us up brighter than Grandma En did, and we will be even more vigilant. Love us, love me too and our skies and lands and peoples will be new. Then we shall heal our deep wounds. I know. I know what the mangrove trees see. Between us, a third power. We have profound secrets. We are bound by a history. We cannot be imprisoned in it. Listen. I hear Change whispering in the wind and kissing the leaves of many trees. It hugs the Baobab and thanks it for not having similar branches or leaves like that of the Meru Oak tree. Baobab loves Mugumo too and in my mind, I can create a child tree called Wa Mugumo, of the Mugumo. It hugs the wattle trees. It begs them not to give up all space to Eucalyptus. The leaves of the Eucalyptus do not know how to hug the wind of Change, they fall hard and dry and crackle. So does the trunk of the Eucalyptus. See its bark sprawling there. Not satisfied with drinking all our water, they eat our bodies in caskets after sheltering us only for a while. Shall we overfeed the Eucalyptus this season without reason or wait until the real call knocks at the door? At the door of the womb, in the ear of a child, to the youth and an old man and woman, should the call come at the same time? Machete cuts. The virus lives. The bloody leaves of violence in the blindness of hating differences must dry. The seeds of violence we need to pound into a powder that makes part of our good manure. Change has no fear. It hugs the thorn tree's every nerve

in the thorns. It hugs her thin leaves. The giraffe knows more than we think. She smiles. Think about your favorite tree of hope and Change.

Be ready with your seeds. There is more manure coming and rain without acid. The *Prunus Africana* must be found standing and growing, the African *Olea* and the *Warbugia* too. We need our medicinal herbs and trees. Shall we carry twigs to show our peace? Maybe not. Let the *Olea* wave in the hugging Change. Grow, peace trees grow. Let Elgon teak sing new Change. *Keniensis*, of Kenya, will be Kenya. Kenya I sing you.

Pain and balm

E asterly wind, run the earth, turn me into hope. We are back to today and all attentive. Kenyalin is the first to ask a question. "I am always listening to good things, but am losing strength and faith. It is hard to live in a slum area. Some even say we should not use that word. When friendship and hospitality lived in our homes in those days of the past, life was tolerable. Now we live with hatred. Will this work?"

I want to answer her, but will she hear me? First we had borders that separated us from the rich. Those are still visible. Now we have invisible borders right in the slum. Borders, both visible and invisible, cut up the earth. Now we have borders of this tribe against the other. Stop. Look at the palm of your hand. Silently. Can you hear the voice of silence? Can you hear the song of silence?

All of us knew how to greet one another before. For peace, we held out the palms of our hands. We laid the palm of our right arm on our hearts when we felt tried. We kept one another warm before. The politicians are jealous of us here where we do not normally see tribe. The seed of militia was sown and young people were sworn into strife. Before the politicians the Operation Anvil soldiers had scanned and caned and shot their grandfathers. Others say we should be ashamed to use the word tribe. If it exists in your mother tongue -in a manner that says others are less human- it does not matter what you do to the Encyclopaedia Britannica. Their Pax waxed war before and our languages like most do, took on shades of meaning. All languages are wise chameleons and those of them that would survive know this trick. Nyerere saw this danger. We had to remind him that every name is a right, he would give up these too. We begun to see stars rising here and there and *ukabila*, tribalism was dying. It was revived and well fed by power seekers and keepers.

Kenya, see how 2007 recorded us naked and fighting. We were campaigning before the blood came. We were following words of senior politicians. We named our little lanes in the slums in their names. Their words grew like crawling plants on the outer walls of our homes following the crooked crevices of shacks. The words came into the house and fell into the fire. The fire was our light by night, no electricity. There is Rut O Din Close! There! There! There is Small Oat Thaya. Now Pamoja, how shall we remain one? When you begin by dividing the poor of the city, all of us get divided. We come from everywhere in the country to the city to live together. They were only one, these politicians, they come together for convenience. They divide us when it suits them. Ask your son Umoja!

In those days, when Umoja wanted to go home past those houses, he was forced to remove his trousers and underwear to cross from this border to where you are! They told him they had to see if he was circumcised and if he was proud of it. They crushed his self-esteem, and that of his people. I am staring at the ground and there is no visible border.

Pamoja begins to weep. She says she had seen and warned about all this before. The others are rapt in silence. There is something reverential about it. I begin to speak about my past because it was broken and I live in the hope that it can be healed. I know they hear and see me. I want to console Pamoja, so that she can make us all like her son Umoja. Pamoja and her son share a strong bond of unity. I look at Pamoja weeping and I remember many pains at home. All pains are related.

Pamoja's was hit many times with a wooden thick club when she showed her Kenyan Identity card which was demanded for inspection by some who made roadblocks and stopped all vehicles. The mini van she was traveling in was commandeered off the road. She was on the way to a meeting about Kenya. Rape and Identification Cards had a connection. It was tribe. They could tell from your name and location where your ancestors came from. All the trees died of pain watching this. The rain clung to the skies. The winds tried to blow it home but it fell far from us in forests of Uganda. Some Kenyans were hiding there. We are the ones who caused the famine of lack of belonging. It caused migrations. We are guilty. We know that some gave terrible instructions to youth ready to go.

Pamoja had seen many movies on the times of the Nazis. She knew the history of Kenyan colonial evenings and nights. The history of colonial dawns and days. In those years, when the local people referred often to the land and sufferings of the black people without using the name of the country, she was there. Slavery was spoken about often. She knew that she and her son Umoja were in deep trouble. I understand her pain. Do not be surprised that the beautiful flower patterns of the birds of paradise on her skirt sometimes do not make her smile. Her orange top hides her sorrow. In her beads around her neck live pains and hope.

Baba called me his magistrate in the house. He told me many things. He did not have to remind me not to forget them. Mami told me that after my finger was healed- the little one caught in the hinges- I still held it out and furiously ask, 'Why'? 'Why'? 'Why'? Remember your own pain is a balm for connecting. It is better not to have such pain, but if one has it, it serves if it helps one to relate to other pain.

There was a bigger cause of pain at home. Father was following up land owed to his Baba. He sold a quarter acre of it in the sixties for 260 K sh; 3 dollars, so that we could buy food to eat. But my grandfather's clan, his father, had never needed to buy food before. It grew on their vast land and even bees brought honey to them. 'Today, you buy such a piece of land for millions of shillings! Ours is gone. We are not the only ones who lost land. Our pain connects with a mountain of pain caused by land ownership.

Savaiva is our neighbor. She grew one banana tree. When it was ready with mature bananas, she hid them in a tank with leaves that sweated with warmth. The bananas ripened. She used to run with bananas on her back to sell them first thing in the morning in Eastleigh and then in Westlands. She sold them off her back. Her back became like a banana tree. In our towns and in the city, bananas and vegetables were sold early in the morning like newspapers. They said nobody should sell shriveled leaves. The saying was common. 'To the market early before the vegetables get limp'. You had to set off long before sunrise. She did this daily. So, her back was her car, until thieves raped her and beat her to pulp. They did not mind that she was shriveled with pain. They raped her again and again. They did not come from the slums these hoodlums. They came from the

rural areas far from Nairobi, to look for food. Nothing else was familiar to them in the large city except a woman with ripe bananas on her back! So, they fell upon her with the violence that is worse than death.

Hariri and Eboni interrupt. They want to know more about my life. I think they want to forget the story of the thieves who beat up Savaiva, but I will not let them forget. For now, I will tell them a little story.

Mami was my first primary school teacher for three years. One evening, she suddenly asked me to act. She told me what to do, and I did it. Pita had to sit and watch me. I stepped into the role of a rich man in a wonderful gown of gold; a man from rich Arabia. I could see it, she just described it. I wore the gown in my mind. All the while as I put it on, I could hear her warm voice in the middle of poverty. I wore the warmth of her heart. I felt the glow of beauty inside. The long coat had tassels flowing behind me. I allowed other children to touch it. Each time any of them touched it, I felt the warmth of their kindness come from their blood to mine. I looked at them with my eyes and together we felt compassion as we continued to hear the story of this man. There was no envy. There was no greed. I pitied the man whom I acted, he was wealthy but stupid. All he did was stroll in his garden in robes until he run broke. He did not work because he was rich. I belted out his story in Kiswahili. This was the third language I learned. I made Mami proud for she laughed richly. I learned then how to pronounce Hariri the word which Mami used to describe his clothes. Our tongues did not distinguish ‘l’ and ‘r’. I learned with time that these are called liquid letters. I imagined that it was easier to drink them.

For some time, I thought that when women made a thrilling and prolonged sound, a ululation, normally in times of joy, they were saying Harrriiiiiirriiii. Meaning beauty. Some do, but others mix all the sounds between ‘r’ and ‘l’ to do this. Which ever sound they use, it is filled with amazing beauty. They are the extraordinary people who fly with sound.

I finished my acting. Mami said my steps were perfect and she laughed afresh when I bowed out. Her assessment. She said I stepped out very well. She did not know see the little children who escorted me in my mind. I knew I would never be like that man. I felt great. I enjoyed the invasion of a sense of space to be and to be

happy in spite of everything. This space filled me. A message was written on the face of Mami. It said, 'My daughter, you can. And do know that deep happiness is not due to possession, except of the self. You can have and not possess. You are even without. Many get obsessed with having.'

Politicians are not alone, they exist on us. We agree to be fertile ground.

Ang' and Oko wanted to know what happened to the lands of Arabia. They spoke of the wonders of Baghdad the city of merchants and great wealth many years ago. Are they the wailing cities we hear of today? For now, we have to concentrate on the losses on our own land first. But still some voices echo in us. Are we meant to shut our ears and make borders in our biology? How can anyone possess the word alone? It has too many lights and insights. You can only embrace it with others.

Sing of Burma, Sing!

In school, my elder sisters sing about Burma. These two girl angels sing very well. Their teacher tells them to keep quiet. She is an Irish nun. She tells my sisters that wars are bad to remember, they are packed with bad memories. War. She says it is history.

Shhhh, listen, I look out through a small window and history is standing right there in a tree with branches and leaves to show to me today. The roots are buried deep and I must look in there. The trunk is full of marks. Someone has etched on the bark of this tree our lives. The bark is not peeling off.

We are in the garden to the left side of our house, I sit with maize cobs. We make many more people with our hands and eyes. I push in sticks into the left side, the right side. Some of the sticks break and fall but others become flexible just where the elbow should be. They stick into the shoulders. I have made hands. I got the legs to spike out too. I was always very concerned about the legs.

I got some cloths to dress and comfort the people we make. Too many people have been unmade by others. Ours must be happy ones. When the others have gone, I am left alone looking for more people.

At such times, I think am alone. I do not think anyone else is with me in my world. My heart fills with a longing to endure. My heart wants to replace the dying in the war which my angel sisters sing about. My heart cries. If you ask it about so many other wars, it will explode. But we cannot live on tears and bursting hearts. I must point out the pain and try to stop the cause. Spilling blood is an old way.

People live in cities with fashion for today but hug ways of which even ancient people would have rejected. Borders and wars. Hatred. When will peace be a lasting style?

The British, the Germans, the French and all these people are caught up in war before and after they come to Africa. In my history lessons, I was always longing for a war to end. It never did. Everytime I would think it is about to end and the teacher would give another detail of a new attack here and there. It was so hard to see why it continued so long. It was like reading about the abolition of slavery. How many times did words have to be said? This coming and going made me tired of war and all negotiations to end bad things. The hurting of people as others go back and forth on ideas and decisions is a high price to pay. Lying in your house after rape, unable to go to the clinic to take anti-retrovirals before 72 hours are over is worse than prison.

It is a new war usually against women. Unleashed from those guns of hate. Priest, I will not absolve you today for telling me on a street in Nairobi that no woman had ever been killed for Kenya's freedom. Really? No woman? What happened to Mary Nyanjiru? What of Moraa Ong'iti? And how many women have been killed with the gun of rape?

In the Seventies, people are dying in Vietnam and before too, Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And Mut my first angel sister, sings as she does her casual house chores all the time. "Our house was burnt in Tennessee before this cruel war! Then carry me back to Tennessee where I long to be..." The radio sings with her. I cry, and dream. I say to myself that one day, if I will find someone to ask questions about this, I will. History. I feel that pain too.

Savaiva, do not cry. Others have had it worse. Work for change. I saw displaced people in my country soon after independence. Charia Wiki looked for shelter near our house. I thought he came from Alabama but he had no banjo to show. So much confusion.

But music brings us beauty and pain inside a pod which we taste as we hear. Wiki dragged his feet as he walked. You asked him a question. He stared deeply into your eyes. You could see his tears beginning to well up.

Wiki had no banjo for his knee but plenty of pain in soul and body. I will tell you more about him later. My mother and other angel sister, Cherita, created him again. I know he will come back again to our house. I looked and I learned:

That sorrow can build hope.
That hunger makes us work.
That food is hope.
When we do not have it,
we drink story dew for sometime.
But today compassion has left many of us.
Where will justice and peace live?
To be just is also to have compassion-
yes to feel for the other.

Now we have seen blood,
now we have seen blood.
It is now we have seen blood.
Blood pouring in a nation,
filled with people who,
would first choose to work.
Achieng', Nyanjiru, Hariri and Umoja hum silently.

I made many people out of rags too. I cried when one of my cob people died. I buried her. I did the entire funeral alone. Then, I went back later to see if what they told me in church classes was true. To see if the resurrection was real. I did not tell anyone I was checking. I understood this rising again would happen to many people and all things too. Mami made us all attend evening classes near church, after age five. I walked back to the 'grave' without any fear. I wanted to see if *It* had happened. I unearthed the earth. I could not find my person. I stood there in shock all alone in our little piece of land that looked very big now. I could not understand. I believed I had dug very deep for this burial. Slightly less than a

half a foot deep hole for my cob was enormous. Now you think it was shallow. I tell you, then it was so deep. I was lost in wonder. I was filled with the pain of loss. Had an animal or many of them come and eaten my person? Had my person come out free? I searched through the soil again and again just to make sure. I did not find her or anything else. I went through the first soil layer. I dug out what I thought was a deep layer of soil at the time. I did not find my loved one. The sense of loss hid deeply in my heart. I remember feeling disturbed. This was odd. I could not pretend I found her even when I saw another cob lying somewhere. I knew that I found the hole.

I knew that I lost her.

At that spot and time as a child, I made up my Justice prayer. It was as unbreakable. It was tough as a chain. I prayed that if loved ones must be lost, there may always be the justice of finding them again. I became both judge and priest. I do not remember getting happy that *It* had happened. I remember asking for justice that I could understand.

Some weeks after the burial of my doll-person, Grandma N's brother came home. He spoke only of memories of the British in Burma. He said he saw their cruel ways in Burma. He saw too the local peoples' faith in their struggle. He learned that all who take away our loved ones or our property must be resisted. He learned that justice had no tongue to speak for itself if the people did not talk about it. He learned the tricks of the British in Burma. He said people had to fight injustice. I listened but I was sick of the world and its wars. Why did adults do such strange things? Why did they buy shiny decorations for shoulders that gave orders to kill? Why did they spend so much money to buy ships, planes and gun fire only to destroy others? Was this all the world could imagine? All chapters of war at home and at school were too long for me.

Later walking to the shops to get some bread, I got tired and started jumping and hopping on my way. I thought I flew once or twice. I can still remember how it was. My left leg curled and hid behind the knee of the right leg. I then propelled my right one off the ground and I went afloat. I did it many times. I did not tell anybody. I remembered this many years after. I do not know how I did it, but I was sure I covered hard ground on my wings. The feeling makes me smile. When I came down, grasshoppers flew in all

directions. The grasshoppers big ones and very tiny ones, I loved watching them. Sometimes a locust would take off spreading out its 'petticoat'! As for flight, I guess I would just jump in the air and dream. I never flew very high. I just know I covered some steps off the scathing heat of the sun which had buried itself in red dusty soil and that I fell back gently on grass patches. There was tenderness in my heart. The feeling in my limbs when I spent time buoyed up in the air has never left me. Gige is smiling knowingly. Kenyalin thinks I should carry on talking. She says she wants many stories. She asks about Baba.

Who cut their flight?

Kenyalin, I wish he knew how to fly but how could he have flown? I wish Mami could fly over the red parts of her life but she put her feet pat on the ground and still smiled, sang and taught me to fly with words later. There was no way Baba could fly. I see that before I was born, he had to wear a Passbook around his neck. Look at this photo here Kenyalin. You can see Number 130092 is written on a foot long wooden board that hangs from his neck with a thick chain. Ouuu! It sure spoils his black coat against which his perfect face stands out well. This is his Passbook photo! He looks young, innocent yet miserable. They have made him look like a tethered goat. How does Baba feel? Passbook 130092 is given under Chief Gachichio. Baba is 22 years of age it is 18-12-56. I said he was 22 years old!

The Passbook grants him permission to be seen in a place they call *Theeka* (Thika) and around Nairobi, a radius of no more than 25 kilometers. He lives in another place they call Kiambu, and which we call *Kiabuu*. A few months on, the *Bathibuku* allows him permission to go to the Rift Valley between 1.12.57 to 31-12-58. I am still waiting to be born. Does anybody know that then? He is only allowed to travel for duty in Kisumu once. He needs a visum in his land, you see. He also needed visas to visit all Nairobi. In the east the land where they pushed the Afrikans, he would also be flushed out. In the west, all the other peoples of Kenya were not at home. There was a time you see, when Nairobi was Europe. There

came a time when Afrika ceased to be. It turned into a wound of raw power. When you point at that little church on your way to Maai Mahiu, remember the Italian prisoners of war. Now then, the cities took a semblance of the continent. The western part of Nairobi became Europe, the central part of it was Asia. The locals did what they could in the East when they could do it. Even then continuous surveillance was a must. For the Afrikans, there was not much of a choice. Their land had to become their heart. It remained in their breath, the rain that kept it flourishing. They took short breaths full of panic, watching everywhere. They fought for justice. This land was no longer their land. How could Baba fly? I am surprised he could buy a Caucasian doll, but such is and was the bounty of our ancestors. They did not close their eyes to others out of pain.

Nyanjiru asks if he could have possibly met and married Achieng' there in Kisumu, Nyanza. I explain that he was there during *Imajeniti* days. I explain to Nyanjiru that Emergency was a time of terror. It meant he was always watching and being watched everywhere like a thief in his own land. That means he could not possibly meet and marry Akinyi or Achieng' there. We have to make up for these divisions. They brought in ethnic divisions. We are here together and we sit on the same mat. We do not refuse to move for anyone so that they can sit down too. We do not say I am from this group of people and you are from the other and so we cannot eat together. Pamoja, your name means so much to us. We are together. Tuko pamoja. You let us sit on the cloth of your skirt and that is wonderful. You remind me of Mami telling me that after many years, her neighbours in her village were the only family from another region of Kenya. A different region. But they loved her. She remembers with a smile that they gave her the name Ahoya- the gentle one, the one who is calm inside. Hariris's kanga cloth is marvelous. When she spreads it out too and we see the writing on it: *Binadamu wote ni sawa*. We sing. As for Baba in those days. See him. He perches there like a bird and cannot make family or friends. Luckily, he is not too late to marry on the other side, his home area. He may have missed a love on both sides, what did the British of the time care for my birth? I was yet to come like so many. We were the lakes and mountains delayed by the British. I might have come earlier, who knows if I was not a flier before I came here? Baba got his only

wife, Mami, from the ridges near the city of Nairobi. Many years later, people learned to see only enemies in one another. The foundation of the school of discrimination, no one can dispute, was laid back in the days when power set poor people against themselves. Yes, in colonial times. Colonialism is not something you can shake off in a century. What happened to the Hausa of Nigeria then, the Igbos will tell you is still felt today. The Yoruba shake their heads in agreement. It is a deep depletion of minds that came to us, because colonialism has a twin called imperialism that always outlives it. A horror for many years with people born already scarred. War is not the home of any person. War is not a home even for the one still hidden in the womb in a mother who does not yet know she carries life. Peace is the home of that being. Peaceful is the home we all prefer. Remember the quarrel and miscarriages I told you of at the beginning of our story. Remember? Why should I be insisting? Look at Nagasaki and Hiroshima. Look how trauma walks the streets of Japan to this day. See how long it has taken for people to heal? Do we dare say forgive?.

Baba loved Omena fish when he ate it once in Kisumu. He went to search for it in the little river in the ridges when he returned. He did not find it. His passbook only allowed him to taste that one fish once in his life time. There was a curfew. I am going back to those days.

Listen, Baba is away. Mami is alone near Riara where she teaches. The front of Baba's Passbook reads: Kikuyu, Embu and Meru (KEM). He comes and goes when he is told. He could not travel without his Passbook in the areas he was *allowed* entry. How do you allow and forbid at the same time? His wife's Passbook, is written at the back of his own. It is F 104216.

I am sure that Baba and Mami would have loved to fly when they were little. They would have loved to be together when young and newly wed. Empires have no mercy on human beings. When an Empire catches you by the neck at 22 years of age, and sometimes even before you leave the womb, it hurts deep. Young boys have thrown away their souls. They saw their mothers and sisters raped. They have shot out like loose canons, their indignation to show. Today, have you heard of the boys who were calling themselves vampires? Killing and raping? I think their seed was sown in violence that happened before. That seed grew like a poisonous shrub. No

one could see it at first. It was hidden but tough. Young men will join in, take money and salute their bosses. They will embrace religious ways and with Internet get embroiled in plans to hit somebody else. Most parents have no idea that their teenager is alone and sold. They grew up seeing destruction of humans and buildings for power, did you expect them to trek in search of the Dalai Lama, with the palms of their hands held together? I will follow the Dalai Lama, but not many will come with me unless we are awake.

I believe we can win if only we are our feet. Eyes open. Ears open. Touch and taste too. I honor Baba and Mami for owning dignity. I understand the many who tired of it and did not notice it fall in the bush. Baba and Mami, I know they were happy in our bamboo and mud house where they began to make us. Love, pain and magical things lived in that house. They still live there.

Kenyalin, this is the end of my story for you. I think I must now listen to Savaiva. Savaiva asked if the story of my love for Kenya was already written. Tell that story she insists. So I begin. Savaiva, usually twists her mouth in wonder. Have you seen how she twists her chin between her thumb and forefinger and wonders out aloud? She says “Oiiii!” Look at her again. She dips her chin in the cup of the palm of her hand, opens her eyes wide and cries, “weeeeh!” We understand Savaiva. This is how you pour out your heart. We shall never forget how you were a car and then became a train for many children.

My head is in my heart

Story! story! story! My story and Savaiva's go beyond story. That is why I say, story! story! story! as if it flows like a river. Let your big story also come. We all have had fathers and mothers and we have this land. Aaiya, what have I said? My written story is beyond this written one. It falls off the edge of the page where we are all meant to stop at the margin. It is swept up by the wind of creation. The winds have swirled up to the top and have fallen all around us. The wind has come down where we are and come into the story. It is our story now. It fills and blows every word we speak in every language.

The wind that kissed the trees of hope now fills our different tongues. How can we allow our gifts to keep us apart? Look at the wind when it fills our languages and their beauty becomes boundless. Look!

Listen, Savaiva. just like you, I think about her often, in my nights and days. Mine and your umbilical cords lie in her soil. Her name is Kenya. I am in love with her. Most of us pronounce Kenya with an open vowel. That sound 'eb' in her, whisper it after me, is 'eb'. It is like 'e' in echo not 'equator- which bestrides us invisibly gracious. So echo Kenya, after me. I hear you say, Kehnya! Good. The British and some Americans insist on Keeeeenya.. with 'eee' like 'bee' and 'queen' and in English! At home, we do not agree on what Kenya's name means but I love it when she means all of us are in love. I love it when she means all of us are free. I love it when she means that those big ones who steal and kill will face the law. Let the law keep justice for all. I love it when it means that powerful people not only kneel but put their heads down in front of the power of freedom.

With the sounds, it is not different with our towns and cities. We all have our own ways of pronouncing words. We are proud of them all. A child playing outside a home in KisiiKenya might be singing to grasshoppers to take their greetings to Nyairobeeh-Kenya... another in *dala*, meaning home in Nyanza, would be going to *Naaairobi*. The child in Ukambani Kenya will talk about Ilobi. The Turkana send people to Nairobi-Kenya, and ask them to greet people in Kenya. Are they not in Kenya? Savaiva for many years we have been divided. The undying voices of the courageous have saved us from losing our freedoms. The eye that is always open, the one that does not sleep must be passed on from generation to generation. A good powerful leader should look at voices of freedom and human rights and smile warmly, reaching out to the hungry who speak about peace. There are violent ones among us. We need to all become Kenya. No politician should divide us. If wherever we are we agree to be the capital citizens of our nation, and unite, look how well we shall do. The margins rise like mist and softly in song and thought they disappear.

Open the doors

I want to put out my hand, my feet and my tongue, to open up to identity as we and our fore bearers -Mothers and Grandmothers too- did in our philosophy before someone told us that our clothes, our languages and our thoughts were too poor and not royal. I want to feel good when I see the doors that Kiswahili opens for Arabic and transforms wisdom within the wisdom of languages, our homes. Rejecting fundamentalism. Rejecting colonialism. When identities melt we can love merging into one and discovering our unity. Hariri, if we have lost the beauty of your name, we still have the power to recreate it, and that is my happy creed. I still put my head in names. My head is in my heart. I seize the freedom to create the future. We can do that with words and more. We can do it in the silence that reveres freedom.

Hariri, our languages need not divide us. They are all fluid and tongues, we have many. We change the name of a place -in pronunciation- sometimes three times in a sentence. Three can turn

into nine and power will still be multiplied. In those days, I would hear of Rimuru and then Limuru in one sentence. I sometimes heard Reemuru with accents in different places. Hariri, this is not my language. It is ours. The names mainly come from a language called Maa. Our languages dance as do beads in our dreams and in life. Even local Torito near my village Duberi might be a sister of Torit in South Sudan. But we called her Turitu; intonation changing from time to time, leaning on the 'u' to remind us of 'utu'- our humanity. Why can we not then, create new love?

We can weave our cloth. We can spread it out so far. Holding it from Lamu, it can cover the north, Marsabit and Turbi included. At Namanga it can roll up to Migori, later encasing the Uasin Gishu plateau the name we gave most of our cattle- Gishu. Mount Kenya cloth might go high to the peak but then it cannot forget Elgon. Weaving right up to the north and South, we can reach each other, east and west are already the route for the sun. And you know beloved Hariri, it is not people that face Mount Kenya, it is Mount Kenya that faces all people!

It faces the Nile too. It sees Lake Victoria (our Lake Sango) and Kilimanjaro's peaks. We can spread wetness around any desert sand. See how Zambezi and Limpopo further south look at us?

Here we play with all names and they come from different lands. It is the Maasai nomads of the plains who named the little town where Mami, a highland beauty, went to school. Limuru means donkey; *ilmuur* in Maa. Nakuru and Nyahururu are cascading soft sounds. How beautiful our land is. Shall we allow that such wonders disappear? How should they tear us apart? They are names derived from the sounds of kind water. Water's purity in truth and humility, its endless conversation of sounds, must bind us in freedom. Naivasha, place of water and Nairobi, a place of cool waters. The Maa speakers, the Maasai, named our places when creation was still moving in the mist of life and rain, not in death and pain. They named many places after water and water by nature is always moving. Names that hold water and movement in them hang like necklaces of beauty all around the hills of our country. Why should we not make them our children's names too? Gige you are surprised. When water seems like it is still where the Nile framed by the desert of Sudan looks motionless, arrested by the dry thick crust of earth, *aiii*, even there, it moves powerfully!

Water, dammed or not is a flexible friend of motion. Water is life not stiff death in a dry plain in the scorching sun. Nairobi was a place of cool water long before we called her city in the sun. Nairobi, is now swallowed by *jua kali* heat and artisans survive hungry. Perhaps an economy verdant like grass will come again. Perhaps the rivers will return; and the trees. But only perhaps.

In the naming of places was the wealth of language. The power of thinking positive thoughts of fertility. The bead of communication in communion is ours to do what we want: we can smooth it in community, savoring the soft 'mmmmmb' in our song. We are born with beads that speak, let us not freeze them in time. I hold out this bead, hold it out and give this bead made of words to us all. This is a bead that must be shared in words from different languages, each language giving it the best color it can. The beads of all religions must only remember warm blood, not cold. Take the traditional bead and roll it between your thumb and finger. Take the Hindu bead and revere it too.. even if you only look. The bead of Islam is round too. In the word we share beads with those who have none. Love gives here. I give it to you now from my heart. The reflections of glass must not be better than our actions. It must not be better than our return into the recesses of the souls of those who yearn and work for peace. Peace is not a hidden treasure which we try to find. Not today. Peace has to become our bodies. Us. Peace active with hands and feet. Peace that points out our lack. Peace that speaks in dissent. Savaiva we look for your peace.

Decades later, I asked older people questions. They told me life always changed and different people wrapped each other with different identities from time immemorial. They told me of a people who had disappeared, but that no one should vanish like this, they said, or else the gods will take away the rain. They spoke of the Dorobo. The people who passed by our villages and named our areas, the people whose young men and women fell in love with our young men and women. They said that whoever allowed a people to disappear would perish in the end. They sang songs about in-laws that they would never see again. They had messages from the Dorobo about the Ogiek too. These old people say that something is wrong when a people shun another people. The people who tell these stories don't often set foot in the city. The people in the city

have no ears for stories without glamor. These people who told these stories called the city near their homes, 'the place of the lamps'- *Kiamatawa*. Others called it the place of the cloth- *Gichuka*. They forgot to call Nairobi the place of beads too. Soon it was the place of all the bad things that all cities have, the things that drunk dry the cool waters. This failed their memory. We try not to name places with evil. Nairobi became the market of not only money but also ideas and faiths. Simplistic at the start, they tried to cheat Savaiva that they would pray for her money which would multiply. She left them with a sneer. Today there are many churches for trade. The people say that the lightning of politics struck them and the thunder of corruption caused confusion as if they had no past before the new religions stepped in!

The language my grandmother speaks has a shortage of women's names. I sit and invent some with her. We mix them with other ethnic names of other language groups. Sometimes am Amandla in my heart, Zulu for heavenly beings and Uhuru for freedom in Kiswahili. I can be of any name, as long it has the meaning we want to seed and Kenya remains my best name, why should I mind? If you call your child Uhuru and you do not love freedom, and your child does not fight for freedom with diligence you abuse a sacred name.

Of those ethnic groups that call girls the names of big animals, the big animals and more, I wish mine could learn. No woman here is ever named even after a little animal. All such names like Gige the locust were taken by men yet the locust is said to have a petticoat! Grandmother says, apart from Wangari whose name means - of the cheetah with all her ferocity- Ostrich, *Nyaga*; giraffe, *Nduiga* or *Twiga* are usually names taken by men. When you hear a woman use such a name, say Mary Nyaga, know two things. Her own name has been eaten in between. The unseen sandwich meat is her name. Christianity covers her name on one side, and on the other masculinity enjoys. Achieng', Wanjiku, Mwikali and so many, such names are reduced to nothing. Men are not usually named after any snake. Some women are. If you find women named after lions and giraffe in other parts of Afrika or this whole pattern the other way around, do not come to ask me why. Afrika is diverse and when you find a weaving with many threads you do not go back to the artist all the time to ask her why she did not weave like the Baganda.

The same old people who told me about the Dorobo told me that women called Njeeri were usually awesome and powerful and they thought I would make a good Njeeri. I have since met fiercely powerful: Sophias, Atienos, Kidude and Mwana wa Mvita. But my own people would not call me the name those who loved me gave me at the lake!

‘Achieng’!, Achieng’! they called me near Lake Victoria (our Lake Sango), you are born in the sun, you are born again fearless today, you are born again, outside tribe. How generous these people are to give me a name powerful with light. I pick it up like a big pod with wonderful seeds, it opens and goodness falls out like presents for all of us. It will not appear in certificates this name. What can we put in a name breaking our jar of alabaster for our own Magdalenas to make and give to eat? Waking up to oil the feet of our neighbors and their tears with our hair to dry is a task that calls the song of love in us to be sung. Head. Feet. Heart.

My local name Njeeri (which the British wrote as Ninjri) means the one who does love to visit, meet people and open their hearts to them. I accept the name you give me, I am Achieng’ Njeeri and proud. Now am at home, I do not need an invitation. I will come for the naming ceremony if you wish, for our land loves all our feet on its ground.

Here in the ridges, our men are named: *Jogu*, elephant, *Hiti*, hyena, and even shepherd; *Muriithi*. I have not met anyone called lion at home in these hills, and Lion I shall call my daughter and all loving youth of the world. Urgency is the key. Come on Simba! Indeed we can be what we wish! *Twiga*-giraffe, *rhino*-kifaru and *buffallo*-nyati, *Leopard*- Chui and *Cheetah*- Duma are waiting. A man fainted hearing me, and Kenyalin had to help him up! Savaiva, I deeply know and love my land and I can hear you all humming again, like bees that suck nectar for honey to make. You love and search your land, you want to know all you can! Lets learn from Umoja.

Stories- our bricks for a home

Umoja, Pamoja and Nyanjiru know so much. Kenyalin tells them to insist that I tell my story completely. She wants to know how I came to know freedom.

The sound of the rain is a happy one. When the rain rolls down on the tin roof we are rich enough to have, they say, we sing. Sheets of water fall off the end and into the funnel. I see it pour fast into our huge container. It is full of water that I can see through. So clean, I drink some. I smell strength in it. At home, stories come like sudden rain, and make me feel warm in the cold. I am born in a story and brought up with stories. Some of them are wonderful. Some of them sad. Some of them are really frightening. I have no choice.

My elder brother Pita shows me the map of Kenya at the bottom of our old green tin cup. The cup is chipped black on the edges. Older than me by six years, he is stronger. "Look!" He shouted as he came running once towards me. I ran out from the corner in the outside of our mud and bamboo house where I sat on the ground in a shade that felt clammy and cold. I pulled my hand out of his. He grabbed it back and held it. We both ran and looked right into our tin basin in which he had poured a jug of water which covered the bottom part. The basin was of an oval shape, a *karai*, as it was popularly called. This one tilted a little on the uneven ground. Now it was still. "Look in there!" he shouted. I did. I had often been surprised by how well a little water on the ground could reflect the sky. I looked keenly.

Inside there, I saw the sky. I saw the sun and the moon meeting. He said it was an eclipse of the sun. We watched it for long time excitedly. It was a hot day before and after the rain, now it felt like early morning. He told me sternly never to look at the sky at such a time with my naked eye. I obeyed then but I looked at the sun the

next day; I looked at it directly. I looked around me and saw black moving spots all over. I was promptly told I had become blind; but I knew I could still see.

Pita used to tell me a story of what would happen if the sun moved an inch towards us on earth. To explain it, he would get a piece of magnifying glass that he always hid. It reflected the sun rays and moving it to a paper it burned it up. "That is how all of us would burn up!" he would say, "like paper!" I did not ask anyone if that was true. I just saw the world burn. There was no way to check if this was possible. I told Mami that Pita should look for better stories to tell. I told him I wanted to think for myself about the world.

On public holidays Baba told us stories as he wore the mask of soap around his beard, shaving. I always opened my eyes wide and looked at Pita sitting on the edge of our single brown plastic sofa chair which was very slippery. It was only the sewn in cord at the edge that kept us from falling off especially when our legs were wet after a quick wash. And they often were. Towels were for other races. They were expensive. It was impractical to have towels. They gathered dust and were hard to wash and depending on the season, also to dry. Baba was there, his face beaming. His story would be told over and over again in our family. He told the story of how Pita was the first one to run and hug a Baba he did not know since he was born when Baba was in detention. They say Pita saw him on a village path and flew towards him. I was born after Pita, so they did not see me. They said I was unborn. I tried to say that I too was coming to earth soon and so I knew something about freedom too. They told me I was not there when it happened. They emphasised that I was not even born. But I felt sure I was lurking somewhere near when all this happened. They told me to listen and not to talk since, they said, I could not have known the story. I think they never will know how I was there and still unborn. I am a child of freedom. How do they know that our freedom was not there before we came to be? They only know their story, their part of a great story without mine and those of others, before we were born. Their story still had exciting parts. They were like curtains drawn back to let us know more than we say or think we know, even before birth. I tell myself the story, the way I felt it sitting on the grass on the side of the road. I saw how it began. I saw it even better than those who were in it from where I was. It goes like this.

My sisters Mut and Cherita and Pita sit on the ground playing with little pebbles for marbles for that is all they had. Do not get confused. It is true according to registers that I am not yet born, but I say I was there hovering somewhere in the shadows. It was easy to get such a top story. Mut and Cherita are much older. Pita the youngest of them all, always alert, looks up and suddenly runs in the direction of a tall man. The man is in deep solemn thought and he looks around as if he is in a new magical land. He wears a dark coat. Pita comes out running and shouting, "*Baba witu ee, Baba witu eeh! iooooi, ioiooi, ioooooo!*" The others follow him singing. For all of them, it is Baba. I see Mut and Cherita running. They run, fall and get up. The story and the mystery come alive for me. Pita jumped into weak Baba's arms. Father smiled and hugged us all. They did not see me. He hugged his children in the outer rim, very near his groin, even tighter. I was there and I was also here. He carried us carefully before birth, like a kangaroo its pouch. Near there, I could feel my younger sisters and brothers that were yet to come pushing me. He lifted us all up to his shoulders, boy and girls all together. I thought I felt the other boy who came to earth briefly before me and left. The very handsome Elekeingati who died was somewhere there even before he was born. My sisters and brother swear we were not there just because we were not visible, but I know we were there. Baba is very tall. He breathes into all of us. He cries. When he left for detention, Pita was only eight days old. I know De Gado you are surprised, but this is true.

Pamoja and Umoja, Baba hoists us all up supported by Mami. We become a flag of Kenya. He and Mami are woven into a flagpole. They are like those soft wattle trees that can be twisted into each other and around harder wood, becoming one strong ragged flagpole. Mami is the quiet wattle today. Later we are nine children, a fair number of those who lived. In those days, we could hold the colors of the rainbow for each of the eight provinces of Kenya, which left us yesterday, and still have one person left to raise our family flag in another far country- the Diaspora.

No one out there knew about our own flag and its colors. Then and when the flag of the country came. It did not come home. They put the flag in the streets and offices and outside police stations and chief's camps. No one put it on our homes, wrists and legs and chests.

But the pain felt in the struggle for freedom, had been in our hearts, our lips, our wrists, our heads, our hair, our wombs, our groins, our balls, our intestines, our legs sometimes chained. But anyone could have guessed the colors black, green and red would be in our flag because these are part of us. I took freedom and put it in my brain and heart. In our case, the flag came first to our family through love made strong by threats and separation.

Mut used to sing that *warurungana* ... are soldiers gathering in masses, coming for Baba. She used to send them away with her weak leg and strong voice. We held on to the black in our body and hair, the red in our blood of courage and struggle and the green in our school uniforms which we always wore with a white cardigan to my mind. Peace on blue, on black, on yellow; it was our syllabus at home. It was a syllabus first taking care of peace with family, our roots and later the world and knowledge of the rest of the world. We held onto our great love. We fought for freedom with meaning. Remember that in 1963 we hoisted our national flag for the first time. We hoisted it on Mt. Kenya but not on every hill and mountain in the villages. We are going to hoist the flag again one of these days I am sure. You will see. We will hoist it again on Mt. Kenya and we shall call upon the world to see, before we ask Olonana and Mbatian to help us stop signing agreements with ink on paper before signing them on our hearts, our grass thatched shelters and soul homes- our churches- which we should promise not to burn again. We shall hoist the flag in our homes, on Elgon, Mau Forest, Ngong, Kilimambogo or any Oldoinyo. In 1963, the flag came to our country and we danced for independence that lost the pulse of the blood that flows in our veins beckoning freedom. I will always remember it lost the spirit of simplicity in celebration. Kaggia would not attend the feasts. He fought for freedom. Fifty years after, we still do not conduct national life in a way that makes Jaramogi, Oneko and Kaggia free. Do they still sing freedom in their deaths? Does Kimaathi smile at us? How could he if we still do not see the humility and pain of the rural poor and hold the hand of the suffering city majority? The young ones have lost excitement upon hearing the word Jamhuri, the coming of Uhuru. There are still more watchmen at every gate and the man who drives handcarts has been joined by women.

Officially, demarcated into provinces and districts, Baba and Mami were in Central Province those days. They went on to name seven others where Kenyan people were. Officials first abused the north calling it the Northern Frontier District, my brother was unhappy. Then we had the Rift Valley that worried Mami. We saw the Coast that attracted us. We knew of Nyanza which we longed to visit, in the Eastern Province we saw hunger many times. Nairobi remained *Nairofii*. The country got eight kids fast. We lived like that for almost 50 years. The flag of love between us in small villages was torn into tatters by some fat men who could swallow twelve De Gados and Hariris for a snack. Essentially things went wrong. Whenever we tried to move out of these boundaries we failed. An identity called tribe held us back. Baba's and Mami's identities were frozen in their passes. They had to wear them to go to Nairobi or anywhere else, remember? One day I wonder if these divisions will soften and wear off. I take a wide and long look around the world. I look at Europe and still hear some people trying to keep their blood and their people pure. There is confusion in human 'racing'.

No one asked why Grandma En had a daughter who looked different in complexion and who had a different voice. There is a Portuguese family out there connecting in a rapturous way with a family on our land which we will never know. As for our aunt, she is not half anything, she is just here with us, often, only the well to do find their roots. The poor are just humans, take them or leave them. I only knew certain things later. In my family, like in yours, there are still some stories which are silent, like the silent wattles in our flagpole. I listen for them with every chance I get. They were never told. Tell us yours. You will see we all gather at one place finally, our home. We are all stories.

Before the British, Vasco Da Gama came. The Portuguese built Fort Jesus in Mombasa. Today Americans would love to preach revival there, but the walls are canons and the *man-o-war-is*, men of war ghosts still speak. Fort Jesus is home of people greeting each other a *salaam alei kum*. Christians proclaim their peace in silent and mortified convent and street armies.

Freedom taught me to listen keenly to the stories that I was told. I became one with them because I was a story before I was born. No one knew that and that is why I fly with words and imagination.

Even before he told me so, I could see Baba pleading and crying at Manyani Detention Camp after he had been frog marched for a whole day. I felt the whips on his body. I felt his yearning for Mami and us. I felt his fears. I felt his longing to be free. Mami told me how he came home. I finished some words for her before she could. It must have been a terribly red time. Many never returned. One dies with his head thrown into the boiling pot over the fire as he stirred it with a big wooden spoon. Mwiko. The boss who was passing by was in a bad mood. He cooked his head. Many died in horrible ways. In Hola camp they were just clobbered to death. Making many men into a kind of snow man and hitting the life out of their limbs that would fall apart and roll everywhere. You ask me why I love freedom. Out of history like this, you either take to love fiercely or you destroy without a stop.

There were many stories like this. I know this story is in the house of many Kenyans. I remember the painful realities of stories...the story we tell of the man who was buried up to his neck in a hole. On his head they put honey and birds came to peck it out, and ants crawled. His eyes bulged and cried and came out. Many never came back, never came back.. there are many terrible stories!

Mami told me stories about her suffering when Baba was in Manyani. When she told it to me, she had the power of taking pain and turning it into something powerful in her hands. She recreated me. I felt green growing over me out of the river where frog's eggs could be still be seen moving around reeds like phosphorescent necklaces. I knew that the eggs would one day hatch. Mami had more responsibilities than telling stories and yet she so many stories told. It is not true to say that she told stories to us in the evenings as we were seated around a fire. That was only sometimes. Stories came out of her feet as she worked, they jumped out of her laughter too, and sometimes her eyes watered with both joy and sorrow as she told those stories that also came out of her ears and silent mouth. The steps that she left behind her as she walked along became long stories. The *kanga* cloth she tied around her waist and how the knot slept just below her belly button now covered with warm cardigans was an epic. She created so many words of different types... and yet she still had so many more words to create. I think how our lives started with these stories, the word even before we were born and that is the only reason we have survived all this!

Planting season

Nyaga and Eboni, listen carefully. We come from a tradition of seeded souls. In the planting season, after the gentle falling of the rain, Mami left the house like an army commander with many women going out to sow the red beans. We liked them red. We lived on boiled beans and maize and unlike my grandparents we sometimes had no beans. I carefully picked up red beans hidden in soil outside our house. Did the world know that our ancestors never starved? With Mami's money, we got loaves of bread and margarine on the great days including Sundays and some beans from the market. At such times, already we did not have beans growing in our own *shambas*. The soil was rejecting imported fertilizers. So, now we had new jobs also for women like Mami. She was a teacher. It became prestigious to buy food in shops. The real problem and quite a puzzle is that food was not growing in the *shambas*, the small pieces of land that the people owned.

In our communities we were good friends. In the families we were well knit. We were often on different paths but the paths met at home and especially in the place where we cooked between three stones with firewood. You might call it the hearth; the place where you make the earth cook; the centre of our heart's warmth. The warmth. This is the warmth that wrapped our stories as they were told by our Mami's heart. Some of us went to the river, and others to get maize and grind it into flour. Some went to plant maize and beans and someone remained at home to clean and feed the children. To clean and feed goats and sheep so that the nation could thrive. Our pet animals gave their lives for ours and not the other way around. We loved one another as our ancestral commandment had bound us, even before the one they call the new one was heard. When one of us was missing the family felt wounded.

In certain universities they began to theorize about the African family. They said it had needed to be big so as to share out work and that was all there was to it! They said we instinctively made such beautiful and strong children and that it was important to stop. This was said on radio all the time. Baba looked at the nine of us and apologized that they did not know better before, but immediately

there was a demonstration. Each one wanted to know who of us should not have been on earth. We held hands and made peace. We breathed together and promised to stand up for one another and for our nation. We know the Chinese are many. We knew Singapore and Burma were not begging their children to give birth. We knew they were doing well economically. As for us, we could not afford to keep cows; we could not keep the new breed that does zero grazing and we could not herd the old Zebu for here there was no land. Again, our traditional cattle were disappearing, and we were seeing new ones that later suffered mad cow disease. So, with the cattle as was with other things, again, they took and left us empty handed. Gishu has gone. Zebu has gone. Boran cow has gone. The Maasai are clever people Kenyalin, whether or not we are accused of idolizing them, we must accept that. And when they point at how badly they treat their women, let us say at least they are ready to learn and change. Let us ask if in history any nation can show less wounded women. The Maasai are a very advanced people, the Maasai, and all their relatives in Afrika resist changes they cannot rationalize, they refuse to take change that goes against their natural ways. They will walk where others will insist on driving. It is true the women bear the pain of tradition but the Maasai know and say that the truth can break a mountain- *egil esipata ol doinyo*. So, shall it be one day. The truth about woman will reign in every people.

I look at Baba's Colony and Protectorate of Kenya, EAK driving licence number 095468. It has a renewal date of 30th August 54. That was three months before Pita was born. Baba's black and white photo sits well on the first page. He is a smart young man. I remember Baba's yearning for our education. His love. His concern. He left detention camp after detention camp, transferred four times, only to enter another prison, the prison of painful needs always aching to be satisfied. Baba would really have enjoyed a carefree life! Given a chance, maybe he would rather have learned new ways and stayed in his old faith. Taking what is progressive and keeping what is comfortable. For him and others, change was not standing knocking at the door and waiting for permission to be granted for it to enter in. Baba would have been a great film star. An icon. His figure sitting on a stool and drinking Tusker beer, sold fifty bottles of Tusker in an hour in a small town. Tusker gave him money for more beer.

I wonder, do you remember that I sing, and singing, I create? I wonder do you know why it is I who was making dolls that began to talk? When will you make yours? I invite you to sing and create with me. I hear De Gado asking about my brother who died when he was only four. I will not cry, I will tell you that story too and willingly. I will tell it from when I was small but before I tell it De Gado, allow me to intimately share with you hours of mourning for so many people who have been killed of late. Some have disappeared. People I knew have disappeared and we still behave as if nothing has happened. We know how people disappeared in Nazi days, in Latin America and the world swore to keep vigil. But it happens again De Gado. It happens. And some critical voices are silent.

He departed, they told me

That season, De Gado, the maize no longer showed off its silky hair which they called *kimira* in my language, meaning mucous. Mother had to buy fertilizer as we could no longer rely on mulching and she also bought cow dung for a good crop. Grandmother Em -whose husband's land was vast before the British cut up local land into pieces renewing the scramble for Africa in local doses- had to go and rent a small piece of land in Maasailand, in Enkare Ngong; after burying her husband. She did not tell anyone that she feared all the land she had left had become a graveyard.

My paternal Grandfather was handsome and charming. He was a gracious man who listened more than he spoke. He was the only one in his family that Grandmother En had respect and affection for. We miss them all. Grandmother Em- stories were missing, and with them, lives had gone. She often told us the story of the loss of this boy-angel who was my brother Elekeingati. See, she touches her head as she explains how he had soft slippery hair of *kimira*. I think she thought of him more often after the death of her own husband. She would look at us when telling of Ghatt as they called him. She told of his incredible beauty and sadly say all our faces fell short of the radiant beauty of that calm and reflecting little boy. When she told us of my brother we would be left hushed in silence and pain. Mami would convulse and tuck her neck into her shoulder as if she was trying to fit her head into her armpit, rather like a duck does, and exhale saying, *ebehee!* It was as if she was answering someone who called her. It was the only time we saw Grandma Em cry. Then she held her head as if a headache danced all over it. She held it for long. My Grandmother Em, before she began to complain about other things in life; mainly her unfulfilled material needs, would tell the story of the boy with the long name whom we now called

Ghatt, with a tears in her voice and eyes. She would then lean forward, dropping her hands into the middle part of her thighs and slapping them. She was a big woman. She would then put her palms together and quickly hold up her left cheek with one hand. Still her headache persisted, it seemed to be dancing like a whirlwind, the one the people call the ghosts (*ngoma*) of women (*cia aka*), preferring not to say the madness also (*ngoma*); which is not too far from what possesses you when you dance to *ngoma* or drums in Kiswahili. You could tell her headache was dancing like that from the way she moved her hands to her head suddenly. She looked like she was massaging her head, as if shampooing it, now the left side of her head and moving to the right and then all together and fast in circles. I would get lost in her motions but the story would be back on her trembling lips.

The story of the boy-angel who was always called *Ghatt Gaitu Karia Gakuire* was forever told with a lot of tenderness at home. *Our Little Ghatt Who Died*; became his full name. His story made those he never met love him. They envied those who had held his hand. He made us love our land. Do not cry with me De Gado. This is how painfully all those who lost loved ones in the Emergency and before felt. We love our land and our people; with full tenderness. Everything that takes our dear ones away is an enemy of our hearts, and of our lands.

Ghatt's story goes like this. My father arrived tired and hungry but had to leave immediately to continue on duty. He shared out some goodies and some troubles. He fondly looked at his wife and children and asked, "Is there anyone then, who has a problem?" It was almost a rhetorical question to which he would have added a goodbye, only that a little voice confidently shot back! The four-year-old Elekeingati nostalgically replied; "Only I Baba. No one else has a problem. I do." Baba was astounded. He stood there motionless. He could not utter a word. This reply took everyone by surprise. All the family wanted Baba to stay and Ghatt's answer had their throats dry and stinging with pain. Their throats were blocked but tears run over their muscles in there. Baba had to leave. Everyone felt that a heavenly being had spoken in Ghatt.

Baba with his Passbook hanging on his neck, left to drive nurses and doctors in an ambulance to go round schools, to inoculate children against TB and to give them polio vaccines. In the village,

Elekeingati was vaccinated. Mami says that the boy became sick on the same day, a Tuesday, and by day seven, also a Tuesday, he was dead. Mami recalls running down to hospital with a very sick child. He died in her arms waiting to be injected at the Kiambu Hospital.

They told me about Ghatt. They buried his little body, my parents, their close friends and a priest. They told his brothers and sisters that he had become an angel.

Naivasha - Dec. 2007

De Gado, do you remember a child crying on a seat in Naivasha, all alone and his mother lying dead in a pool of blood in the type of house where the floor is also the ground? In the type of house where beaten out tin cans become mirrors reflecting light and bringing in too much heat into the house in the sunny period? How could I forge this De Gado? How can I forget this child whose pain reminds me of you? And pain is pain, the same pain Mami felt for Ghatt. Supposing you had not grown old enough to leave for the city with your two little feet De Gado? Supposing those who killed this Holy Mother of Naivasha had killed your mother too? How can we forget the boy whose Mother lay killed in cold blood? How can we forget young people who were killed? Pain is pain, De Gado. So, things were to get worse not better? Too many little ones are gone. Too many parents like my own in those days, are still devastated. I know you worry about others who are killed. But the loss of an innocent child De Gado, who bears it with total sanity? A nation bleeds tender blood and dies.

Continuity

My Father was injured for life. His first child of freedom after detention was gone and I was yet to come. It was a bad time to travel around on one's own and burial ground was to be found quickly. Mami agreed that little Ghatt was laid where the priest

suggested; near the Riara church where Ghatt had been baptised Joseph. Riara where Mami and Baba had gone for a Christian ceremony of marriage.

When Ghatt's story is told, all the family agree that he was too young to have spoken like he did, it sounded as if it was someone else who spoke through him. He never told what his problem was and he was not sick then. When he died we agreed that his problem was that he was departing. Consolation of his returning when another child would take his gender and name was never enough, you see, it would always be another one, not Ghatt. But when such a child came it calmed many fears to call him Ghatt. But everyone always feared asking this new child questions in case the first one had returned with him and he too would have problems, speaking briefly like him and leaving. Mami still talks of Ghatt's little grave. She can never forget it even when it is not on our land, even when school buildings have risen where little Ghatt's bones lie. Ghatt's grave lives in our minds.

Fifty three years since she stroked young Ghatt, Mami cried last week when some people told her they could not return to the Rift Valley where they buried their people long ago, for fear of attacks and death. Some said they had nothing to bury as all their people had been burned up in a church, not buried in a church yard cemetery like our Ghatt. For their children we still wail. Mami still weeps. She wailed like Rachel, the woman in the Bible who refused to be consoled and who still walks the earth wailing. Or does not Rachel cry in the heart of every woman whose song of joy is broken in the death of her little one, in the death of buds of hope, in the death of new feet of peace?

Real Power

I dislike pain mingled with fear, it strangles peace. When Baba came back, he was speechless. Some now older in the village, then but little boys, one of them a writer, swears that Baba recognized all little boys of our village in the dark. Perhaps this was pain groping for little Ghatt and wanting to solve all little boys' problems. Baba knew them all by feeling their foreheads. The writer tells this story looking at me as if he fears I have Baba's powers intact in me. You

should have seen how he looked at me before he told it to me leaning on the open door of his smart car. He looked at me in the eyes but his gaze fell intently on his shining black shoes. He prepared me to hear something extraordinary. He told me that Baba was the man coming up a village path towards him, his brother and his friends. He says they were running around the maize plantations and zooming up and down little paths and he was in a corner in one of the paths. He says they came running in a way that could have frightened Baba because of the noises of the darkening evening made in the sudden rush of young boys. It was getting dark fast. The writer says in a time when there was much crime in the village, Baba was not afraid. He bent towards them and they gathered in his two arms. He told them to stop moving and that he knew them all by name. They shivered a little upon hearing this. He put the palms of his hands on their foreheads and feeling them closely, began to call out their names and the names of both their parents. When this writer tells me this part, he is sure telling me that he felt extra power in Baba's palms. I still do not understand this. You need to see the writers face when he tells this story to believe this what am saying! "Your Baba felt my forehead and said, 'this is the little one of Nyanjiru! It is true. Believe me!' he pleads looking at me in a sacred way. I have to accept. Our family sensibilities are above the normal. Mami's relatives sometimes say they speak to heaven.

The year 2007

I had my moments in June in this year. I saw our country burning before the world proclaimed it was. But we had been led to disbelieve our fierce love, our tremendous connection with our earth. Dictatorships and other voices stole our space. We lost the power of our Mothers, Fathers, Grandfathers and Grandmothers, even children like Elekeingati put together.

Pamoja, You will remember that fear grew like a creeper on our national flagpole tree in July and through to almost November of 2007. Kenya registered persistent earth tremors. Seismologists said they were nothing new. They told us the tremors always happened

but that this time we were able to feel them because they were a little stronger. Were we this much weaker? Surveyors and architects declared that Nairobi could not endure strong tremors and earthquakes. They told us most of the buildings would crash under such pressure. The epicenter of the tremors was in Tanzania, in a volcanic mountain named Ol donyo Lengai by the Maasai- it means the mountain of God. But we kept our eyes trained on what we wanted, we refused to look where nature was pointing at. We said the meteorologist was as mad as a shooting star, leaving its home lonely to jump to that of the neighbor.

“Why do you look surprised and even amazed, Ang? Did you not at first feel the earth tremors, Jogu? You are named after the elephant and it knows trouble early eh? Nyaga, I even saw you run out of Nyayo Torture Chambers with your wings in the air. About you, some cited a proverb that says some run like ostrich faced with fire? Umoja, do you still call this a House, this Nyayo? A house is the one we built together, the one we are going to build in this country out of the clay that is us. Why do we not work our history from within? From our connectedness? It that a House? Hariri, is it because that is where we get our passports? Kenyalin, do they feel great there those who are appointed ministers and are surrounded by corruption; in this the House of Anglo Leasing corruption today? And do we then feel good again to travel with these passports to the rest of the world not seeing we are in exile at home? I see you have stopped singing and humming. You are dumbfounded.

Allow me my traditional song:

The Mountain of God- Oldonyo Lengai does not spew fire for nothing.

Hiss! hiss! Hissssss!

Kiss your nation for peace!

I stand at Freedom Corner. Across from Nyayo Torture Chambers, the tremors shake the Nyayo Monument. I am Change! The monument of Moi where his baton tight in his fist emerges from the bottom to the top, searing through the intestines of Mount Kenya as he faces Kibaki in State House, and I cry. It was a great opportunity you had, to make this country one. I wanted to see hope but I see rape. Red tape is still sealing us.

The curse does not die. Your hand, pushing a fist right through my country, raping it in front of our Freedom Park, what blessings do you give? Pamoja claps.

Images speak on the sides of this monument. There is a family on one side. Progress, I am being sarcastic, Gige, is measured by showing one wife and one husband while many hidden kids peep from the behind, you see. Mothers covered in big peacock headgear bow their heads in shame, ministers and mistresses hide except one bold one who raises an activist's head.

On the other side of the monument, a fish, wheat and sugar cane! You want me to think progress again in sweetness. But flour is a luxury now, *chapatti* food of the blessed. Sugar, white crystals, fills shining bowls in big hotels. There is not sweetness at home. Fish are dying in Lake Victoria. Where, Oh Sango, is your victory? Is the season of maize with silky hair gone forever?

Look Achieng'! A cockerel struts and fills a whole side of the monument, all by itself! If it is for show we build a whole city, let us show our youth, yearning to move on. This old generation that hangs onto power too long needs to go home. Perhaps they can tell bed time stories to little ones, if any gentleness is left! Grabbing power and refusing to move, the cock crows betrayal.

Kenyalin, the antique telephone opposite the cock is a reminder of how to this day you tap our phones. You are afraid that we are discussing your press conference on your family at the height of famine as Nang'ole dies of hunger! You fear we are exposing shady business deals. If communication is not for the people but for you to chain them, let there be none. No communion. Let the bishops return the host to the cup, as you kneel and wait. Let Kimaathi, walking to the hang man's noose and not on his knees, teach you religion. See how he gets the baptism of blood, the priest is only a passer-by. The high priest is at his own altar: Kimaathi wa Wachiuri.

You know you betray the people and you cannot win. Who can tap our bush telegraph which beats your efforts to muzzle the tongues of the people? What is abnormal we refuse to accept as normal. Instead we rave and sing! I hear you all join me. We sing. You say in our stories we are hearing each others stories so that we do not really need to change the tellers? No, I suggest we should change the storyteller now.

Our conversations and text messages and even text books are devoured. Now your new intelligence system complains when Bunge la Mwananchi speaks at Jeevanjee Gardens on the other side of the city near the Central Police Station. When Wangari and women at Freedom Corner reclaim Uhuru Park with the spirit of Kisoi wa Munyao who raised the flag on Mt. Kenya, did you think that was a small feat? Savaiva, you know it was great. You have been there yourself. I say again, when they, the women, say they have no other flag than their bodies that cursed you, should you have smiled again? You thought they had no impact until your children tried politics. Old toothless gum refuses to tell the sweet stories of Afrika. Every side you take loses. The constitution will not be your choice. Will you see the curse worked when it is too late? Beware! Our Mothers for their children's freedom stripped naked over there, just across the road. Look, they are still there! Look at Savaiva! Mr. Politician, these are not tales. Do not look at our freedom to curtail it, the curse is only for you. The freedom we have won is for all. Our mothers' nakedness is vigilant. It is Kenya's stamp and lamp forever.

Let me say it in your ear. When there are deaths in Eldoret, Likoni, Olenguruone, Mau Forest and Molo; and before that at Shimo la Tewa and Kamiti; you are haunted. While that hole still holds Kimaathi's head buried in desecration and we refuse even if without remains to give him a hero's burial- burying a symbol the nation becoming his body- We can never walk straight. While they lie silently and cannot, are unable to speak for themselves, gone in extra-judicial killings of recent times, and we dance and celebrate, none of us are safe. The whirlwind of women's ghosts will haunt you. It will dance over your head like it did on Grandma Em's when she spoke about our boy-angel. No one will know which spirit bothers you, and you will not find a cure.

When youth walk with unseen fetters
all through our country;
hand and foot cuffed,
when the trees are all gone,
do you wonder where,
the birds would perch
a message to bring us,
since the youth can't run?

The rivers dried up
the valleys mourn.
Do you ask where
Mau Mau have hidden?
Why is Mau Forest charred?
This silence and inaction
marks your disgraceful exit.
You sit, Uliyebacki,
on the Nyayo monument
derailing reforms,
Yes derailing reforms.
For change has not come,
change has not come,
and when it comes it will not salute
you first.
It will be brought by the people,
yes, brought by the people ,
who will not be sitting
on artillery for war.
People who will not
be watching armies pass by.

You say you have reformed. We have heard it took threats from rich nations. Why should you wait for warnings to hear your own mothers' voice? Every ridiculous deed from the powerful in our lands, take a whole race back to the whips of slavery. Not all the world cries with us. Some smile with glee saying, we told you.

Eboni, you still look at me with surprise in your eyes. I speak to rulers through childhood dreams and adult labor. Our Fathers and Mothers, our grandparents labored to give birth to this country, surely, it must grow and marry someday. I ask you Jogu why you are surprised. Did you still not see all this coming when your mother was raped? When your three month old was defiled, did you, like Rachel, cry, refusing to be consoled? When those boys who went to buy *mandazi* were sodomized at the back of the kiosk what tied your tongue, Umoja? When dead bodies were exhumed and left for all to see first thing in the morning, your eyes went on sleeping? This was not ordinary news.

When no one followed Robert Ouko's murder to the end, and we choked on our questions speaking out for Bob no more, was that a good sign, Kenyalin? You must not wait only for powerful people to speak out for you. Speak out in many voices for you and for others. Does history wither, Pamoja? Mboya, J.M. Kariuki, Pinto-how do we face these? So many disappeared youth, both Muslim and Christian and others, so many others. The openness of Buddha escapes us. We do not breathe peace even when we want good. We do not want terror we help create fear? Pushed to the edge of oblivion some people do not become saints. Francis of Assisi left wealth to become holy, diving into icy ponds. Today, faced with the sword, most become brutal. Why would we help create fear? The word liberates. All of us must speak and listen. You have all gone quiet. Your eyes beseech me to speak more of evil things in their softening silence. I continue.

Why are you surprised?

Ah, the bomb blasts at the U.S. embassy in Nairobi and Dar es Salaam (haven of peace) did not rumble loud enough to be heard in North Eastern Kenya, you say. But surely here we know Kofia Mbaya? There where Turbi is always disturbed? And Marsabit is really Mars, the planet, a bit, a tiny bit remembered? But even before that, we had seen it in Rwanda and then at our *refere damu* deaths in Kisumu! Had we not? Deeper is the silence now, listen.

I hear noise that I cannot ignore;
Their feet fall in unison stamping on the ground,
like rain trained to thump the ground
with equal force.
This is curious.
It has been dry for a long time.
I move to the window leaving one eye at
the high level constitution meeting.
The minister for law continues unperturbed.
It is a moment of the letter against the spirit.
Now, with or without order.
Here is what is new.
There below us a sea of young people,
say they want:

their leader free.
Food they can get
for themselves they sang,
with their own hands.
With and without the law.
Freedom is to be guaranteed by all.
Then a battle of silence.
They run in the street wordless.
Raw power exuded,
from their silence;
a militia marking time,
suddenly, you see the action.

I was born when my parents were holding the struggle for this land in their hands; the love of a nation and pain hidden are deeply in my soul. My parents thought the way out was education, but here the challenge is deeper. These young people disdain mainstream religions. They say in masses that their eyes were closed with the sweet balm of *bossanas* as they were robbed of their being. So, don't ask me why with your eyes wide open, why I refuse to give up. Your eyes plead with me to carry on. I want to infuse our country with freedom and love without using any marble arch, mountain of snow peak or book of philosophy. Our beings, are they empty of justice without the books? I speak and act because like Baba and Mami, I feel the soul of our nation. With my first cry, I breathed in and out the oxygen and the carbon dioxide of the struggle to be free. I felt Kenya's racing pulse. I smelt the fires of carrying a Passbook. I felt and saw clouds of sadness hanging over villages built as Mau Mau reserve villages with our fathers and brothers in detention camps. I saw the hook on which the British had hung the Geneva Convention on rights. It was stamped Emergency. It was bloody. It held many human entrails this big hook. I touched Kenya's tender heart in pain. I am and I need the memories of our family and nation. You cannot love unless you know! *Aiii*, a nation is not defined by borders like a country. And goodness should have been defined in our humanity not conventions.

We need firsts

I have told you hard things. Let me go back to a short story that shows it can be done. Yes. Even with the help of officers in government. To change, we must pour our traditional alcohol on the ground for firsts. Ruksana sets the pace in the North which kept women in the dark. Everything new was first done by men. Ruksana's eyes twinkle as she tells me how she became the first woman driver in her region. She saw a man driving and she wanted this for herself. She loved what she wanted. She loved to learn how to repair a puncture. She went for it. Because she loved it, she embraced change. She told me, "The next day I was outside fetching water. I had my clothes in a paper bag near me, ready to run away. My uncle in whose home I was living had told me I could not go. I had seen a mechanic repairing a flat tyre and decided that driving and repairing cars was my job in spite of the hijab that clung all over me. My uncle was astonished. 'Who told me, a girl, that this can be done by women?' he wondered out loud. I answered that I told myself. Suddenly, I saw the face of the officer who was to look for me. I abandoned the pitcher of water and washing basin and took my clothes in the plastic bag and ran off with him. Someone alerted my Uncle and he gave chase on a camel. I remember seeing him from the corner of my eye just as the helicopter left the land in a well prepared take off. The chopper blew and the dust flew all around. I was so happy in there. I had taken off from the hard life of endless house chores for people who did not appreciate my taste.

A nation lives in our blood. When you become a government officer what takes away your blood? Why do you believe in punishing others and helping only if they bribe you? Can you not perform better than the president, I ask? The return of the seasons will mark the beginnings of the making of a nation, and people, will fill their ridges with children and joy again.

Tracing little graves

All of you have sung a chorus begging that the stories do not stop. You say that at another time you will tell your own stories. You must do this. You say that in my story, you hear your stories. I agree. You beseech me to carry on in sweetness and in pain, till hope makes us live. I will take your challenge. Heeh, Kenyalin! You know what tickles the ear might not tickle the eye. You know that the modern ear can be stuffed with sound in an ear telephone! And you know the eye now reads living things with colors on a computer. Tell stories, tell good ones, tell stories of joy and of sorrow. The nation's heart and soul are in your breath. If they go to the computer or to the ear machines, they will carry your breath there too. Do not stop telling stories I beg, it is like breathing. Without air we die. If you tell them and others tell theirs, in the end we have one great story that will bring us so much joy. Our story of love for Kenya is personal and in our soils.

I remember my elder sisters and brothers tracing Ghatt's grave near Riaa Mission. Mami did not know Mut, Cherita and Pita had taken me to show me where Ghatt's little bones lay. Perhaps this is why my cob doll, remember that story, was never found. I had wanted to us to find the boy-angel and bring him back. My sisters and brothers said it could never happen, but inside my heart, I was sure for a surprise. We did not find him. I would feel the loss of not having met Ghatt where all could see me meeting him. Inside me, was another world in which I felt rich inside as I was with him. It was like he was me and I was him. I have a brother, I would feel, so little and so adorable; so like all of us and yet, so different. But I could not touch him. I love the earth in which he rested. I love my country.

We do not like graves, but our beloved lie in them and like everyone else we protect them. We look at, stare and look after them even if all we get is pain. We wonder what holds their words

now that they cannot tell us where the problems in life are. Do the dead tell their stories in silence? What other words does Elekeingati speak over there? Is it possible he is just silent? I would I had a world of little mummies to keep children such as Elekeingati and smaller ones who die earlier. I would like to see them sleeping comfortably as if like in an Egyptian mummy as I ask the deepest question I will always have. The deepest question still unanswered. Where are the people we love who became silent? All I know for now is that their bodies are in the earth. I love my land for holding them. How did humanity learn to cope with this strange transit before we took our turn to come and walk on this earth? How are we supposed to walk here? Carefully and without disdain? Without any force or priding on our strength to send many to their graves? I choose the simple and peaceful way. Earth, accept my footsteps.

The earth, but more than the earth, our people. Those are our roots. For Mami, Elekeingati was her nation. She became Kenya in a different way from the day she buried Elekeingati without Baba. It was as if her own umbilical cord had been cut and buried again, the way the umbilical cord of this nation was cut when we killed the Mother of Naivasha, leaving her little child alone.

It is as if I came after Elekeingati to be loved, and to live by stories. They did not recognize him in me because I was born a girl and they named me -as tradition had it - after my aunt. They waited for boy child to be born long after me to re-name Elekeingati. They called him Elekeingati, but he told them he was Tei as a baby choosing the soft sounds in his name. They thought he was just stuttering or that it was just his name that was too long for him. But who knows? Maybe he knew he was not Elekeingati. Tei. We could never understand why he chose those sounds but it seems those are the ones he heard.

I searched in our family histories. This is where history is not events but breaths of the past in the present. The place where history is breaths of the present explained by the past in the future. All Elekeingatis in our family, loved to walk to distant places. They never felt bound by the land which they were told was their area.

Everyone longs to be free. There are no visas required for the loving heart of the troubadour or the busy fingers of a worker who bakes bread. We belong everywhere and nowhere almost

simultaneously. So, why did the provincial issue become so big in the meanings of our lives in the villages? Why did the district threaten to make us so parochial?

One senior Elekeingati, My Grandma En's brother, once left home walking and never returned. He is known as *Elekeingati Uria Worire, the Elekeingati disappeared*. He went on a long, long journey which his wife Thoni still sometimes hopes he will return from. She is 85. She says he is still in this Kenya. He left a beautiful family. Thoni, herself so charming, bore Wam, Mami's lineage. Wam was a visionary who brought heavenly messages home to her village; but she too could not tell where her Baba went. Mami is a Wam, a clan of her own, too. We are seekers of more than land, we have visions that fly day and night. We crisscross years, beating arrangements in books.

Pestilence of violence

During Post- poll violence in Kenya; 2007, how could I not grieve? The pain of the dagger went right through my chest and curled up in the heart. At this point, it was alright for them to say madness had come home to stay, for even death had become our hearth. Ghatt's wound came alive in me. His pain and problem is still unresolved and it insists in being felt in us. Our peoples' wounds and ours, can they ever heal? Savaiva has allowed me to speak for her. She is crying. The others say I tell you their stories too, after Savaiva's. They weep words, not tears. She says that you tell her story so that her burden becomes lighter. She wishes that your story will pray and her life will be different. Not just a change in words, but a change of heart! A complete one.

Savaiva is raped. As we read this now, she is being raped again. She left us for a few minutes as we sat in our meeting of stories to go and sell bananas. She tried to hide. They caught her just now. We have not changed. She is being raped and we must become a live story that draws justice out of and beyond the law. Rape is not a story to tell and for some to laugh about. It is a terrible thing. Savaiva was raped before and during the violence of 2007. Now

she is being raped again. There is no history of past rape. It is always happening. Savaiva has been raped many times. She has been told she will be raped again tomorrow and that she must keep quiet. A politician, and his friends politicians are laughing all along! One day, it will be them who will face trouble. We do not wish them rape. We try not to be vengeful. Nyakairu lost her natural color, she is ashen and not her normal smooth and shiny black. She lost her color when she heard about Savaiva and other women and children who were raped.

De Gado was burnt by the son of a rich man and taunted to join his dead mother. He survived this torture by faking death. We had not foreseen this. Kenyalin, the first of all young Kenyans, wilts and dies. She has seen terrible things. Savaiva and De Gado and all the others will now be her, trying to tell us what our pains are all about. Savaiva will never be the same again even as she watches the bird of paradise rise and speak. But just like the heavy loss of Elekeingati did not make Grandma gorge her eyes out, although they were always wet as was her heart, we and Savaiva keep looking at the little light of hope that burns in our chests. We keep up hope. If we do not keep it, will those whose children were burnt to ashes in a church keep it? Perhaps hope can fan out and grow, lighting up even when we run. Hope has courage in it, and it remained when we ran and hid our lessons in our pierced hearts and wounded lips. Hope gave us some distance and we walked in courage until we reached a place where we hid our lessons in our soft cloths worn by the Maasai men and women. Our soft cloths might be hardened in blood. We hid the lessons we learned in our beads. If you do not know how to love, see how we long to be one and wake up!

The sun rises. Light shines again after deep darkness. It shines like Grandma En's eyes! We see inspiration coming. We bury Kenyalin beside Elekeingati and stay on. We wait as if we had ever seen anybody return from that exile.

I will carry on.

Weep for Mother Kenya. Her loss clamps the steps of her children, tying them down when they would rather dance. Has she, my beloved Kenya, not seen her wetlands turning into desert? Has she not cried for irrigation? Rain water is no longer as clean as crystal. It sometimes is the color pink and purple. Its strength is lost.

Wet the ground for life to be sustained again! Mami says that our Ghatt, who reminds me of the innocence of milk will never be forgotten. She still tells of his face, his nails, his eyebrows and hair in detail. I thought I saw some of us when they described him, but it would be agreed that none of us could match Ghatt's beauty. Not even all of us put together.

You think my look is a vacant gaze? Do you ask why I search beyond the light of the sun? I am looking for Kenya's life, eyes, blood, tongues and all her features to tell of them starting with Kenya's heart. The pestilence of violence has robbed us of Kenyalin. I want to find Kenya's heart again, as beautiful now as Kenyalin was. I want Kenya to marry freedom for all.

I learned that one cannot hold a bird of paradise or a beautiful white lily forever. Kenyalin has defied our thoughts. I go again to check for her beside Elekeingati. I find with joy she is not buried there. I saw her return. I found her sitting and talking with us in our gathering of souls. The bird of paradise, it blooms when you thought it already died. It shrivels and dies to be born again. When you plant another seed; it is not that one that went that comes to life again, yet it is. The one you plant gives away its skin and kidney shape if it is a red bean. It is like a woman or a man who are ready to be selfless. It takes off its skin and casts it into the dark earth while whispering a promise to every grain of soil. It sighs saying with clarity. 'My land shall be born again, my land shall live again and this seed's growth into the air will be the sign that my land lives again. This seed when it grows above the ground will be the flag of my nation, better than the one we make with cloth'.

A seed never dies. The seed will live and will die, so help it grow. If you do not, it will return to life by itself anyway. Gige and Hariri are helping Kenyalin to live again. Gige gives her lifts on his lovely locust wings to our meetings. While she rides on top of him, Gige's petticoat floats all around and again he sings... *drriiii iiiii driiii*. He sings with the joy of one who gives selflessly. He has learned a new song to sing.

Cede space

Let generations in leadership give place to others, to plant trees and to re-birth the soul of a land. Sing to my wounded nation. I go to Mami and ask her to sing the anthem of the struggle. I am in the village again. It is difficult to fly over this path, the way I used to when I was a child, but song does help me fly. I can tuck in my left leg again and fly. Baba gave me a lift to liberation after they scribbled lies about curfew in his Passbook. See how Baba gave me a lift to life. Gige learned to give lifts from Baba.

After Elekeingati died, Baba hugged me often. I felt he held me tight to make sure he could keep me alive and warm. He played with me many times. Who hugs this country of mine for healing? Its fathers are not its owners and its owners are not its fathers. Its owners are not its mothers but its mothers have given their hearts, lives and souls. Mothers hug my country with stories also from grandmothers. Our Mothers and Grandmothers, let your gums be warm with the breath of story telling and do not be ashamed of being toothless. Our best stories are not in our teeth. They are in our hearts. Listen to the story of Baba and I in the air.

Baba would pick me up to play. He tried to shed the pain of the hunger of justice and to caress the tender hurt in the muscles of his heart wounded by Ghatt's demise. I remember my little skirt gathered air and swung round with me. For me, it was as if the earth went dizzy as I gulped in fresh air and laughed. The earth moved with speed beneath us. I was flying off Baba's fingers with delight. Then I could not breathe any more. I shouted and Mami came out of our kitchen. It was built separately from our bamboo house. She demanded that Baba put me down with a perfect expression of 'naughty boy,' on her face. He defied her. He laughed heartily. I started laughing too, but the wind filled my mouth and lungs. He put me down. I tried to walk but my legs felt disjointed. I slumped down with dizziness. I thought I saw the maize plants running in one circle. Those were our happy moments of riding in freedom and its risks.

I called this swinging in the air that father did with me, 'going butterfly, *kiburuta!*' Baba did not stop doing it. Even long ago, Baba must have known I already flew by myself and so he tried working

with air crafts so that we could meet in the air. Wherever he is today, if above the earth in which he lies, he must be laughing. I remember it as if it were yesterday. Alive in my memories. I loved to share his human winging, *kihuruta*. I loved it and feared it, but there I was riding on air again. I was above the world but in Baba's arms. Both of us fell into the red dust which flew all around us many times. Mami began to laugh with my joy. She told me Baba had drunk a little *murat* as we called the local alcoholic drink at home and that I should not play too much. I was scared. Baba begged me not to cry and called me 'sweet', never 'sweetie'. He spoke in Mother tongue, but the word "sweet" was just "sweet" in English. In a long walk after, he told me many would think he was foolish to live in a crooked house but he had chosen integrity to wealth. "My daughter, I have many calling me aside, I must tell you the recent ones have been from the East, telling me that they could make me a Magendo King. I have preferred to be just myself. I did not fight for freedom so that I steal from our country. I fought so that each one could get their just opportunities."

I wept when I could not find him and his hands and voice again. Baba loves foreheads. He trusted brains. He woke me up with a kiss on my forehead on the morning he left his bed in hospital and people said that he died. I was lying on a hard bed in Limuru, where women who believed in changing the world were in congress. I cried louder than all thunder, but Baba had gone to rest.

Who dreams of holding my country from all corners, flying her high for no price, letting my country's skirt fly in the wind and harming no one. Who knows her forehead well? Who can tell who is Kenya's mother and father from feeling it? Who wings her up in the air, letting the grasshoppers take off here and there like choppers that bring life, not death? Who will let my people fly? Who will blow over my country with hope? Who will let people be risk-takers? Who will lead them to self-improvement without fear and to self-reliance too? These are basic ingredients for growth. Hope brings security and joy and investors flock in. Who will swing the Maasai Mara and cry when she is drying up? Who will dance with the beauty of the giraffe and of the zebra? Who will let *Nairobi's* lights not blind us? Who will dance with the Mau Forest? Who will take the first steps with Elgon? Who will swing beads on the waist on smooth skin and on the chest with bulging breasts?

Who will call my country sweet? I want to tell you I will. I will call my country love, sweetheart. I will call her now and when we define poverty again, acknowledging values first. A people without confidence prosper little. Black must be loved as the colour of esteem and beauty. This is not only for the rich.

I will call out my country's soul in the eyes of every displaced person, the refugee, in the eyes of every street child, mother and father. Street family. But in order not to run amok, you will help me call her sweet by allowing people to create jobs, won't you? I am just weaving the threads I need to woo her back like you might remember, Hosea did. 'How can I forget and leave my loved one?' But my song is long, deep and wide. I will sing like Koitalel Arap Samoei and Mugo wa Kibiru. The iron snake need not harm us, we can tame it. There are black butterflies with golden wings, that I see. Mugo foretold the invasion of the continent by people with a white skin. He saw them in the pastel colors of the toad hiding in the moisture of banana trees. We may never match Solomon's grandeur and glory but our song, our song, and Waiyaki wa Hinga's can be heard in Solomon's song. The frogs of the bush, and the butterflies sing it. Someone sang the song that parted the mist of the Rift Valley for the Maa speaking people to come home. Our people the Maasai, let me beg you to be with us. You have named us as a country, you cannot disown us. Your son has flown us on Kenyan wings for years, and his father Naiku was a peace maker. We are not deceived we know your loss but you hold the unity we need in song. Do not leave us as Lenana signed us in 1904. We know now he sits on Mt. Kenya. Mbatian is quietly rueful and we know his sings peace. Kisoi kissed them both but we lacked wise leadership. Antelopes have their holes. Ntimama, hold your peace. Lying low was your advice. Did you forget we intermarried for years? Do you wish a people to disappear? Let justice hold us together. If the land is yours, the law says it will come back to you. Love is the better memory. Let us make our relationship playful and not warlike, your daughters still smile with our sons. Maasai beauty is strength too, the Morans must be for Kenya. Maasai women are cloth clad, Kenya cannot be without them. Siangiki, you are welcome. Feel at home in Trans Kenya.

Mami's curfew is endless

Nyanjiru must know, she wants to know what other trials Mami has endured. Nyanjiru says to redeem a nation you need people who never tire of suffering and pain. Mami's two beautiful girl-angels, Cherita and Mut, were walking and pretty and now they are crawling. These are my two beautiful sisters. Polio struck their right legs weakening them both and simultaneously. Mut and Cherita, my adorable big sisters and my parents' beautiful daughters take treatment but their legs remain dangling down and weak.

With the third baby, a son, suddenly Mami has three babies crawling and none beginning to walk. Elekeingati is dead. Finally, once stronger, Mut and Cherita both get crutches and then caliper shoes for their weak legs. Mami's throat is itching with the juices produced by the cynicism she has endured. She gets goitre. She is Baba's only refuge. They laugh at Baba in the village he remembers. But he does not break, he wants change. His humor goes with him after every mass. He makes Latin hymns in local tongue and laughs. After detention, ridicule is what awaits him. He insists to those who ask him why he has no sons but only lame girls that they are his sons, his two girl angels. He holds them out proudly, the way I hold my dolls. In a weak moment he tries to hide them. Stigma is ugly. It makes us less human, stealing compassion. But Mami knows and heals his edge of despair.

Let me say to those who aim for power that I will be proud of my country in her weakness, if I see that we intend to make her the best. When I see that her women stand out. I am proud. Someone call the world to compassion. For Gandhi gave you his soul, and the powerful refuse to kill racism, laughing at us for tribalism. I hold my country to my breast. I sing her lullabies. I sing her healing.

Women know the pain, they must be part of the cure. To you who rules her with a heavy hand, if I see your heart in pain and your will steely in helping her survive, if you, who say you are my country's fathers could hold us out like Baba held his daughters and say we are healing, I would take consolation. But you see, Baba loved his children to death and he loved Mami. You do not love Kenya, the Mother of your children, with all your heart? Do you in the end dislike some of her children? I am surprised that these children still love you. You are a father with a heart of death. When I hear they give you power like this from a far, in the mysterious West, I shudder. Who in the world insists on killing our freedom forever? May their gaze freeze on Kilimanjaro.

If only I could see your eyes melt, when you hear even one person died because of a vote, when you look at those injured in my country because of a vote; the way Baba's eyes used to when we were sick. When you look at those burnt to death, made homeless because of a vote, at thousands buried six feet under because of a vote, and continue, without justice, compassion or reparation, without singing about healing, I see darkness. If only I could console the many mothers whose children are gone, the way Elekeingati left. Mothers whose children are maimed by war, not even by an invisible virus, like Mut and Cherita.

You sit comfortable in a castle you made with our money. You do not seem to feel the earthquake that started with tremors, you do not see the reddening and burning of the soil beneath our feet.

Do you not sense fire within neighboring borders where you should be taking peace? You ask us to dance in glee for your one wife and family with our feet bare and burning in the hot dust! We can feel war coming. We are Mothers and our souls are alive to unpronounced curfews.

Fathers of hard politics, do you not see the magma flowing in from afar? If you cannot feel the pain in the lining of the nostrils of our glue sniffing children you think then that they are breathing life? No. They die. But not before exploding petrol bombs. If you cannot feel our glue sniffing children in the outer parts of your groin, if you think they are not yours, you are not a father. You do not feel the cut of a sword in your blood cells when you see a child girl soldier in Sudan. A girl-child raped. You think that is far away

from your land. Well, the boy is getting raped too. You do not feel the lightning women say flashes in their bodies when they see boy soldiers in the bush anywhere in Afrika. We are one and you must work beyond borders. We shall take this power. We have visionary women.

You do not know how to hoist a flag of hope and love, justice and peace, why should you pretend Kenya is not widowed? Why should Kenya care for you? Who will soothe the villages of the disappeared if you do not know justice must flow before magma comes and hardens?

The song of the villagers then was different and you cannot blame them. They never knew lack of health before. When they saw Baba and others wed in the church tradition, they wondered if Mami and Baba would be blessed with children, for they had betrayed traditions. At the very beginning the villagers' first concern was if my parents would have a child. They were involved in timing the coming of their children. They got two daughters before Uhuru. When they got these lovely daughters, one after the other in the fifties, then the people started to ask why they had no son. When they got a son – Pita, they now asked why they had only one son. When they got another son Elekeingati, polio came home all the way from far countries and took the little boy-angel. Why does disease know no borders while health does? The villagers put the palms of their hands on their mouths and did not speak more. My parents could only guess what they said when they were alone. In those days, nobody's life was private. The family was birthing inside the stresses of the struggle for the making of a nation. The whole continent was engaging freedom, it seemed.

Change had come from the top to them, could we today change from the bottom to the top? Grass will grow, grass will grow if we water it with dew they say. One dew drop from each person is all we need and many rivers will return. A tear drop from each one and our world will heal. Not the tears of emperors- enough with Nero's bottles- but the tears of the liberated all color faces whose tears are as free as the the rain, include the tears of the black. No one can bottle the rain. Look how strong former generations living here were. I found some of that physical strength still in Grandma Em and Grandma En. Our parents are physically weaker and worn

by the struggle. They have seen too much pain and blood. We have to eat green to survive this. Afrika may have been a disease free continent, but the one they called Africa is sick. You will be surprised to listen to how jiggers found their way to our feet.

Things are different. Today, it is different in many ways. Everything is becoming smaller and more easily manageable, but not yet our own governing. It is still large and shapeless. You and I can with a click see facts about any country in the world without traveling to a mission school or a library. Do not let them cheat you they see history. This one has no place for Mothers. The real story is preserved in stories of those who still breathe truth in and out.

Moving your fingers well on keyboards, you see many things. It is almost like making dolls that can live and share stories. These little shiny faces we look at today are still called monitors. Do you remember the monitor they made you carry in shame for speaking your home language? Today you can share information and letters in an instant with a monitor. It does not care which language you want to use. It follows your wishes. Try with the story of polio in English. Go to a search engine. Key it in. Polio story.

“Michael Underwood first described a debility of the lower extremities in children that was recognizable as poliomyelitis in England in 1789. The first polio outbreaks in Europe were reported in the early 19th century, and polio outbreaks were first reported in the United States in 1843.”

Another entry

“Polio outbreaks were first reported in the United States in 1843. A turning point for the disease occurred in 1955, following the introduction of an inactivated polio vaccine (IPV). The decline in the incidence of polio continued following oral polio vaccine (OPV) introduction in 1961.”

Polio, or more properly poliomyelitis, was one of the most feared and studied diseases of the first half of the 20th Century. It appeared unpredictably, striking its victims, mostly children, with a frightening randomness that resulted in near panic during the epidemics of the 1940s and 50s.”

Elekeingati was born in 1956. Not everyone accepted all change unchecked, Kenya should not either. Grandma En refused to attend the church service, saying that the priest practised witchcraft with

his symbols and actions. She did not get held back by the fact that missionaries saved her first child from death apparently through baptism. She held onto her reason. She did not go to her daughter's church wedding because she said that the priest did not consult her on dowry dismissing her as a single parent. He had overlooked her, she said. She derided priests almost all her life. She thought they were mean as they would not share their kind of wine with her after the consecration. For Mami these were times of inflicted shame indeed! Baba and Mami overcame, they did not die of shame. Baba did not look down on his big sister who had no children. He loved her. His two girls would limp and fall, limp and fall but they got up. Mami and Baba knew they had to find support and so they did. The name of the hospital was long and of Greek roots-Orthopaedic. They found out where it was, and went there using the road on which Waiyaki Wa Hinga was dragged from Fort Smith to Nairobi and then Kibwezi long before there was a highway. They went when there were no bus or (matatu) mini-bus public services, with children who could not walk. They traveled the same road that leads to Muthangari today.

Allow me to speak, for it is all of us who speak. I and all the people in this gathering of souls ask you, you and you, our questions in fury. "When a nation is in pain, why do you reject healing? Will you stop when we bury everyone? Do you think it is Kofi Annan's, Luis Moreno Ocampo's or the world's headache that your children are sick? Do you think Benjamin Mkapa should pray for you in Nairobi on Ash Wednesday, yes he was there, and to his ancestors while you dream war? Do you think Kufuor will run to you from Nigeria and Graca Machel must come from the south for you to put down machetes? Why would you protect those who bring death and disability to an entire nation? Why not quickly take first aid and allow ambulances whose sirens are ringing to pass? Would you have your family out in a tent for so many years? What would you do if your family was dying? For your family's reputation, you are haunted by lies and you call press conferences. Now you might just see embers but you knew it was going badly for us. You knew when the smoke choked us and killed us, along with machetes and guns. Rape, you knew about. Savaiva, how long will you weep as they dance and watch? I hear Nyanjiru and all the others singing songs of pain and searching. They are searching for herbs that heal. They

are searching for songs that sing no tongue, holding together in language. Justice in the Rome Statute is forced to be our home. The guilty suffer fear. When we are with justice, the sunshine lights up all corners. If it is justice you are looking for, why has geography overtaken history already abused? The court can be in Mars as long as justice comes home. The moon and the sun saw who helped death envelope our people.

Winds that sing

Advice from the wind. Take a pinch of tobacco snuff from Grandmother En about the role of human will in life. Borrow a leaf from her. If religion does not make sense, put it aside and make do with the work of your brain and hands. Why do I see you sitting in the front pew only during election years?

And why do the people wait for the churches to see for them, even to vote for them? The church will not come to your rescue after you cast the vote. It will tell you to read the Bible. The nuns will tell you to wash your *sufurias*. They have a thing about cleanliness, but they will not wash your politics because you are praying. You must find songs of the struggle in the frying pans as you wash them, wash and sing. You must remember as you bite into a nice golden *mandazi* or muffin that you must pay your taxes! The big ones too must pay. The rest is theft. Listen carefully.

Listen Hariri and Achieng' and all the others. I never heard Baba tell us about the sudden coming of freedom, Uhuru. Baba talked always of the struggle and vigilance. He told me about his friends who had gained much money since independence at the expense of the people. They blew the horn of power till the villages fell apart. They took all the waters from all rivers...

"I will never warm up a bench waiting for Mr. Politician in the early mornings, as our people do, to get favors!" Baba said, He blew the whistle early in the hour.

The Mau Mau of Murang'a tell me that those who fared well when the Union Jack went down, those, are they who collaborated with the colonial rule. From Murang'a, they sent me with greetings

for the Mau Mau of Duberi and with a reminder. No one who really fought the Brits got power.

Kenyatta got a position so that he could accommodate many with his strong lips. So, I tell you, Hariri and Savaiva, celebrate Kimaathi! Those who fought are broken and maimed, forgotten and buried. Their children are the disappeared, the assassinated and the deprived. And those who remain do not just look on. They come. They brace up and have faith in themselves.

Circling many ridges, moving without ceasing, they are here on foot. By foot they went to Parliament and Harambee House, Treasury, Jogoo, High Court mutely treading and again past Jomo Kenyatta's statue at KICC, City Hall, the Holy minor Basilica! Tourists' cameras on Inter-Continental scaling high and again the mute youth. The tourists click, click as the young ones hit the ground with a: tuff! tuff! tuff! tuff! tuff! tuff!

They march around Kenyatta's Mausoleum as if to wake him up. He sleeps on. They stare at an empty Uhuru Park. Their eyes shoot like bullets in our souls. The nation sits down again to go through constitutional acres. The rest of the world is harvesting and has made billions since you Kenya took your first step towards constitutional reform in 1991. The young men who march tuff! tuff! tuff! are impatient. Young women who sang freedom are impatient too. We have been waiting for long and we fear when the new law comes, implementation will suffer constipation. All of us have been waiting too long. A young minister sits unmoved and he clicks his mouth with the sound of indifference and disgust. I am trained to react to sounds by nature. I am trained in sounds such as these and others, to hear the future, nature speaks. His sound is irrelevant. I hear the buzz of the sounds of hungry youth yell in through the present moment, their mouths becoming bombs! Who will shelter our children? Will they rape me and my Mother at one go?

Everyday, the smaller pictures of loss and lack of opportunities loom large before us but we were too afraid to look. How do you hear the word rape again and again and continue doing things the same way: walking, eating, sleeping and even yawning? How deep can parliamentary slumber keep? Parliament laughed at those who took sexual harassment to law. And today it is the same, it laughs but quickly wants to wear the crown of success for change. A million in salaries is guaranteed, for what else do they care? How do you

look at 10 million people dying of hunger and remain sane? You who sold their maize for profit, you will see none of your steps will go right. How do you look at glue sniffing teen mothers and their babies, and remain unmoved?

Maybe if we agree to look deeper together we can find our strength in Pamoja and Umoja. When I look into my family and how we grew up, I find much inspiration for my sense of nation; am rooted in the earth.

Earth goddess,
Earth goddess,
Cleanse me, cleanse us!
Take these snakes and a skirt make,
Take this pain and turn it into love!
Give us power to break spells!
We have already rang our cow bells,
Kit Mikayi weeps.
Mau forest is naked.
Mt Kenya snows blood.
Grassroots' blades cut the Mugumo tree.

Let our people see Kenya's history with new eyes, hear her with different ears. Let us the people ask questions. Let the people go to rivers, hills, seas and mountains and listen to the rumble. Let them go and build a new heart. They are so deprived of sight and feeling, compassion the milk of cow gods that fed only on green grass. Those who deserved kindness had so long been starved. Listen to this and feel it:

Slithering on a sack on her back in her house for many years is what a woman former freedom fighter does, covered with the soft darkness of a house without a window, she is forgotten. Weeds have grown in her fireplace. Blackjacks come through the crevices of her walls and become her spiky blankets. Stinging nettles are her towels, their juice her water, the only reason she is still alive. But she is all alone. Thagata is all alone. She listens for voices that like the sun might come through the little holes in her wall. Sometimes they do, but they fade away.

Thagata has a daughter who has children and is abandoned with her. How could she have known the freedom of moving away from her freedom winner? Did not the world teach her it was too hostile long before she could speak just looking at her own mother, a winner of freedom cleaning her skin of black jacks? Her grandchildren once pulled her around the house on a sack. They wanted her old bones to follow the little sunshine that came through the cracks and the opening that was meant to be a window but which refused to ever open again. The sun has set and they have not been to school. If they were not there, she would have lain in one place on the floor of her house for many hours. She has to be grateful. The sun rays that could penetrate would have played on her skin and all around, but it has gone. But the dampness grows greater. Heat slowly dies. They carry her up in a sack, her little grandchildren do. If it were not for them, earthworms would have entered her from behind and then from all over, finding her skin soft and cold. Not so far from her house, Mheshimiwa who was a homeguard as Thagata fought for freedom is grinning on a church platform. He is calling out for money as the priest sits down. He is going too far in church. He is calling the people flies in his sick accent between brown shining teeth. Christian teeth are smiling back, shaking. They are worshipping him. At night he would snore in one of his fifteen rooms in a mansion. His children would be dreaming of how to take over power and money from him. They could not bear the thought of living like those poor people. They had never stepped on ordinary soil in their lives. They wore golden straps.

The worm of corruption has eaten deep. It has eaten the only way it does. That green maize cob covered with leaf looks healthy until you lift the leaves and find an arching worm, moving with its entire family in there. It has drunk all the milk of the maize under cover. It is white like milk now.

These worms are in Parliament raping the nation and young girls. Male teachers make little girls pregnant and excuses are made that they are stressed. There is no excuse for this behavior. These mad teachers with no tradition and backbone, these ones who would take off their dirty pants in front of innocent girls should be hanged with Parliamentary rapists. Sound the call clearly once and for all! Blow the horn!

What has happened then to you? Are you of the generation that maize makes into milk before it hardens and when it hardens it makes it into a powder? Eh, to play with a grain of maize is tricky. Ask De Gado.

Kenyalin is begging me to stop now. Is she afraid? Will all the rural and slum people ever be sealed by fear or will they learn to sing before the boys marching around the city destroy us all?

How do you stop change? I only know how to make it before fear grips all and like zombies we freeze! Pamoja, I beg you to take over. Take us back to the past again. Listen. Change never stops, it only takes you up as a part of this whirlwind of thought. I have not stopped. I am in you. You are the outer whirl in the wind. Change is either now in the present or it is not there, it is alive. It is not like sweet jam that you can take and eat spread over bread. It takes courage and brains to keep watching change. If we had to honor anyone here, it would be those who watch all the time, and feel and think and respond.

We build, you destroy

All live in this meeting that is life. In this meeting we eat and in it we live. We drink and we sleep and never stop. All are in this meeting. Wherever they are, they are thinking, making things and they never stop. Jogu knows that. Nyaga nods. Hariri, Achieng', Ang' and Savaiva, all keep going with all the others. Pamoja becomes the wind that speaks now. Listen, nothing is totally new in the story and yet something is.

A new house for Kenyalin's grandmother

In those days, looking at their natural 'mud knee-high boots' you wonder why all those black legs are dressed up in red mud boots. Yes, they had worked the mud with their legs so long that the mud had caked and they looked as if they wore red boots on black skin. The first man arrived and was soon joined by the many women who had arrived carrying water on their backs. Together, using hoes, they dug out a basin out of the earth. In the basin, they put back the same earth they dug up. This is the hot season. More women come with water barrels on their backs and pour out the water to wet the soil.

Everyone: men, women, boys and girls jump into the hole with bare feet and start mixing the soil using their feet as big spades. No one brings the abomination of sexual theft here. It is time to make Gogo Wa Kenyalin a new house like ours. It is time to make her a super hut where everyone can sit around and fit in. It is time to mix up the mud and then paste the house and smooth it out. Here in our land, this was not done the way it was done in western Kenya.

Over in the west, you had smooth walls carefully finished off with cow dung. Instead of learning how to smooth out walls like those of the Maasai Manyattas and of the people of Western Kenya, some of our people went to *Nairobi*, came home and tried to make houses of wood and cement. Many were stuck half-way. They went to pick coffee in the farms of the rich in tears.

People here wanted to live like Wati and Heho; English settlers who had very large farms near our quarter acre plots. But we only saw their spiraling pipes irrigating their coffee from afar as we fetched water on our backs from rivers hidden between steep hills. We ached to get out of mud houses. We had enough with the mud. We touched it to plant, we sang to it weeding crops and we coaxed it to harvest. We mourned to it when we buried our dead in the rain. It was time many thought, for brick homes. They comfort humans.

Why do you today play about with stealing land from Kenya's Mau water tower? This is the water that irrigates all our land in Kenya and beyond. If you can steal this one and go free, why was Baba detained? We will protect our Aberdares, Mt. Kenya and other water towers. We refuse to anger the river, lake, and sea gods.

Pamoja, I want to go to my mother and ask her to sing me the song of the struggle again; a song in which we all have a note and an instrument to play in building our nation. We want to take the drum, *Kayamba*, *ishiriri*, the accordion, the guitar, the pipes, nyatiti and all instruments you can think of and sing resistance. I want her to sing me the song in which the people can marry whom they want. Will you all go to your Mothers and ask them for your song of the struggle for a nation to build? I hear very good music. It says, Yes, I do. Do you hear it?

And all this is not for any music festival. I tell you, we must learn to sing for ourselves. Often the music festivals and the celebrities of this world do not see or hear others. Betrayal has many forms.

I, Pamoja, recall the first home music festivals. I tell Umoja about it as I saw it then. Hear this. He moved up his right arm and moved it in the way a good music teacher conducts a choir. Up goes the arm, and the fingers create an imaginary figure of eight before briefly falling to the waist level and quickly rising again. Now, both hands have their fingers coming together and parting to allow for more volume, before tightening up to a soft sound and we are heard softly singing; "*Hoombe, Hoombe! Nyathi ma ywak... Ondiek weye.. nyathi maling.. Ondiek*

chame! Hooombe, hooombe, boombe, hooombe!” We repeated the words clearly after our teacher in a language of our fellow Kenyans who live near Lake Victoria which we had never seen. Language, history and geography were foreign to us right in the middle of the ridges way back in the sixties. Yet we repeated voices from America saying that we too are black and proud!

We sang this lullaby to compete against others from all over the country instead of singing for all of us to enjoy and to learn more about our neighbors. I loved the song, but not the idea of judges. There in our hearts this soothing song nestled. Our love grew warmly with it for a people and a language spoken far away. In this competition at the Kenya National Theatre, we belonged to the category of schools with students who did not wear shoes even to come to *Nairobi*, the capital city. We left our homely village early to arrive there in time. We participated. They announced the results. We had lost. We lost and yet we did not quite know what losing in singing was. We knew we had to follow the music teacher’s instructions to win. No one protected us from thinking that this was a minor failure and that it need not have made us lose our esteem. No one told us we had tried so hard even by just entering to sing this music piece and being the mouths that broke tribal barriers. When I said that I, Pamoja, felt bad, they welcomed me to a rough, rough world, where no one consoled you if you thought you had not succeeded. Someone held the measure of success and we were not able to relate it with our amazing efforts. How I wish we had won and taken the first place to lift the trophy. We had tried so hard! An international school with girls who spoke English in a way we could not understand won. My friends said they won because they knew how to speak and sing through the nose. We spoke through the mouth and sang with it. We lost. The students from that international school wore clean black shoes and long white socks and most of them were Europeans and Indians. Some of them also played flutes and the piano! And they sang songs we could not fully understand. We wanted to sing *boombe* and for the mango. They sang ‘tally tallow’.

“As I out rode,
this endless night,
the three jolly shepherds,

their pipes can blow.
Their pipes can blooow..
They sang tally tallow...”

We wondered what it was to sing ‘tally tallow’ but we heard the music. What did they mean by out rode? I only came to hear of this again when I was much older.

The mango, the mango is so nice!

Then came another school with some pupils who wore torn shoes and others to sing after us and the international school. The pupils were again barefoot. Some also had torn school uniforms which they used at home as these were the only clothes they had. Their choir master raised his legs and his empty belly well tucked in behind a tight coat in a dramatic move, and he swung and danced springing up and down, jumping while conducting a song called ‘The Mango’. Never eating any fat, nature had shaped him well. His whole body conducted the song fast. The judges, we were told, whispered to each other that he was primitive and that is why he did not have a belly to swing. He did not know it of course and he continued his drama, jumping up almost as high as a Maasai moran to conduct his choir. They thought he was a clown. “The mango!” sang out the sopranos, and the base, replied,

“is so niice!”
The mango.
Is so nice.
The teacher bring.
The children eat.
The mango, the mango!
Is so niice!!

The choir smiled. It was the most yellow school choir on stage, the uniforms were bright like, do you remember sunlight soap? They were yellow like that. Yet, a fascinating smell that drew me to them,

strong and filling the lungs attracted us. We followed them. It was a great choir and the most lively choir I ever saw. In the end, all together, they went on also swinging in waves and from side to side, ““The mango, the mango is so nice! The mangoooo... is so nice... The teacher bring, the children eat! “The mangooo! Is so nice!” they repeated many times and again, “the mango...the mango is so nice!” They ended with a sudden bang. “The mango is so nice!”

They judges said that the teacher and the children over-expressed themselves while singing this song. They were quickly taught the difference between song and drama. Were they supposed to hide what their body was saying? I heard that again when rural pupils read their poem in Kiswahili and knelt down as they spoke to show how they beseech God to help them pass their examinations after they removed jiggers from their feet and hands. Again, the judges said that the students had not the control of the western stateliness and that their choir conductor and they were rated zero long before he had indicated the tone and before he started dancing. They stank, they said. They wondered if they washed that clumpy hair on their heads. Others said the students were destroying both the arts of singing and reciting poems. The west was the standard. One needed to recite poetry, the Pied Piper of Hamelyn, with the right foot thrust forward at an angle, like a ballerina waiting to fly out. What happened to the eastern people and the Afrikans? Did they have no standard?

We are not planted in music schools, but like pumpkin tendrils growing, the music just grows up green with us. It yellows in the sun like the mango. These children who sang to the wonderful juicy mango had already lost before they came. They had no shoes and were cold without warm clothes in the early morning chill in which they left home, to sing in Nairobi at the Kenya National Theatre. The school that came second drooled along;

“When I play my fiddle in Dooney,
folk dance like a wave of the sea,
My brother is priest in Kilvarnet,
my cousin in Mocharabouiee! (*Maharbouiii!*)”

A nun let her veil fall elegantly behind as she conducted the choir. She had taken off the veil that was like the burqa before. I had seen her in the mission church. She only conducted two verses. Ang. Today I know why you are a the silent musician. I have looked up the other verse in the internet. It does not have holy words. The nun was stiff and she conducted using a cane. The pupils had shiny shoes. They had clean white socks. We wondered how it was possible to keep them so white. They came second. I removed my reddish brown handkerchief that used to be white and wiped my forehead. A nun saw me. She sent me to greet Josephine. She told me to ask her to look out for a letter in the post. When I went home, Mami asked me to play the drama of the rich man who had no brain again, just to calm my fears against competition with the rich. I did it, remember it? I did that and we laughed together. I slept well.

Music at home

There is nothing wrong with our drama even when we put it in poetry. The fine ones say kids are tortured to act verse but when did they ever see the children of the poor swinging leisurely and carefree? The standard mark should not be one. We accept different forms of expression, and honor other cultures. Listen to how the Indian voice does it. See how her body dances and sways. The torture you see in our art, is our life. Only we know how to express what we deeply feel. Only this can heal us.

I longed to feast on national music even then. As Pamoja and I know, music and art have the power to unite us. We must not let it get lost in classy approaches.

Back home in the ridges then, suddenly Baba's voice rose, as he shaved:

*"Aai, ai, eii ng'ombe,
mulai wa mama,
ei ng'ombe!"*

I dashed into the big house and there he was dancing, bending his knees a little and smiling broadly as he pushed his arching arms outwards to and fro above his head imitating the arched horns of a Zebu cow.

Aiiiee aiiiee'
eing'ombe
mulai wa mama,
eeii ng'ombe!

His arms then fell to his waist and he started twisting. The rhythm spoke for itself. I do not know why I did not need to ask Baba what the words in another language meant. I heard '*ng'ombe*' which means cattle in many of our languages, and that was enough. Joy was in the rhythm of the song and the '*aiii, aiii*', told me that the song from western Kenya was my song too. I began to dance.

Perhaps there was no time to speak between the expression of wonder in my eyes and Baba's delight as he sang on tucking in his brownish shirt which was originally white into black smart trousers. He was drowning in laughter looking at me staring at him. There was no Passbook around his neck. He now had a temporary job in the city. Rhythm and song drew me to him, and song could take me where words did not matter. He held my hand and started swinging me. I began to dance as Mami looked on and laughed. I smiled. The world was lost to us. Sometimes, a girl delights her father in a special way. Everything sparkles clean and laughter and love have a new meaning.

Dance with Kenya. Make Kenya happy, dance with her. Hum to her and she will stand up. Pick her up and make her sing, songs of honey coming from the soul. Protect her waters, make her proud! We are good people, and a little relief, a part time job, makes us happy Pamoja! We know that this happiness should not make us forget our determination to be the best in all ways.

Change

“Are you Change?” Nyaga asks me. If you are Change,” Nyaga says, “how could you take pride in your Father’s crooked house?”

He wonders why I continued to live there if I was so ready for change. I ask Pamoja to allow me go back to explain this better. I did live in an almost falling house Nyaga. It is better to live in a crooked house than out in the open. But when in a crooked house (as we are now in a country that looks rather crooked) the people with a vision for a new house for all must never give up and rest. They must defend their poor house as they try hard to make a new one. I remember what Baba always said about our house. He always said that nobody could dare point at his crooked house because they could see his smart children and understand where all his money went. Kenya could say the same of her many children if we do not kill one another. If we kill, who will be left to show?

Change happens all the time, guide it. Change is managed by those who know that power needs guidance moment to moment. Power requires that even when it is vested upon us, we still look at it from a distance and with reverence. Some of the biggest changes I know will come when we are not afraid of how our houses look like but we take our dignity there. They will occur also – and this might shock you- with the way we deal with sex in our lives.

“Nobody dares point at this house of mine!” said Baba, waving all his fingers at the house and swinging his right side shoulder as if it would follow the fingers in a move that would make him dance. He was not drunk. He was in control. We stood outside our house in a patch of mud. The maize, growing hardly a meter away, had newly grown silken hair turning blonde at the tips of the tight green leaves that enveloped the grains. I sometimes thought the maize

loved to show off hair covering the maize grains even inside the sheath of green leaves. But the maize looks threatened by the sun which roasted its soft hair into dry and breaking strands.

“Nobody can point fingers at this house!” With those famous words at home, I felt I was being invited to take charge and make sure no one would look down on our house! I was a little hesitant to leave my easy zone and go to into that circle of the mature ones of the family, for this was the beginning of everlasting responsibility. Baba said honor preceded and followed wealth. I remember I promised Baba to study. I promised him not to have a baby early. In our village, it was sometimes said that a girl had a stomach, to mean that she was pregnant. It sounded like her fate was determined and sealed forever, with this happening. Every language dealt with this in a different way. Baba had a way of having this conversation with me without mentioning the word ‘sex’. How one got pregnant was understood because the Gikuyu word for it was a whole drama. It is a phrase that sounds to me very unpleasant- *kibirwo ihuuu*. This they said with ease, but no one mentioned how and what happened for it to become. There is definitely the sense of some flying liquid in *kubirwo*. The phrase made me feel like one would be roughly squeezed and then suddenly something would fly into the woman, *huuuuuu*. My mind understood it as something woman suffered. Something woman was a passive recipient of, and I did not like that. Why then allow it to happen? It sounded like pain and trouble. The word *kubira* also related with pus formation. It did not sound attractive. It was not for me. I wanted Change. I still asked Mami if that was a natural expectation that girls would not get pregnant. She talked about marriage.

Mami told me that even in olden times, it was not acceptable to have a child out of wedlock. It was still so in her days. Having children meant getting married as it does to many people today.

Then many years later, she picked up my son whom I held in my arms and said I had given birth to a king. The King had a silent father in silent letters unpronounced. She is so proud of every grandchild. In her days, unwed mothers, not fathers were ridiculed and called *gicokio*- rejects, They were ostracized. They were branded like cattle. They were Hesters in Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *The Scarlet Letter*.

In the family, I knew other stories that had remained well guarded. Grandma En was a single mother of two with pride. She was powerful beyond telling. Grandma En told us that our Mami's father was not her type of man! We did not ever meet him formally or call him Grandpa. She did not hide the secret why she did not like him for a lifelong partner. A woman of no inhibition, she did not care for social convention. She smiled and laughed saying she simply wanted better legs in a man. She wanted them long, strong and standing like the letter 'L' if you make it longer and make its 'foot' into a human foot. Grandma En was a shrine of freedom. She longed to look at people in the eye as she surprised them with her free speech. Grandma En's house was straight, round and smart. She was a dresser, that is a nurse trained on basics in the hospital mainly on the job. She was educated and spoke English and Kiswahili; both of them colonial languages, in her own way.

This is the other story. She wore trousers in 1939 in Kiabuu town. She enjoyed shocking people and letting them see her enjoy her thoughts and movement- her liberty. She strutted holding her choices up in the air as if they were shafts of rays coming from between her long finger nails into the air from arms held perpendicularly at shoulder level. She ran with her arms in the air like that, and sang to remind whoever heard her that she loved what she was doing. She ate food and ate her joy. She said she did not owe anybody anything. It was her life that she was living! Never mind what they call you: dolls, rabbits, enanos, pigmies, yellow, black or white. What you are, be without apology. What you must change, do it and announce the change. Do not wait for anyone to lay out your altar, light your fire or set your table of freedom! This power comes from Grandmother En, the lightning.

To you politicians. Don't try to stifle Kenyans. It is their turn to speak, to love and grow. Don't try ancient methods, they did not work even then. Grandma was defiant. Tradition then was oral. How could you ban free expression? If you tell them not to write will you stop all the people from speaking? I know you silence voices. You did stop J.M. Kariuki with death. You allowed in the first bomb after Mau Mau in Nairobi with this. The sign was ominous for the country's life. That you would bomb a bus of Overseas Trading Company. River Road sees it happen today. It is the noise that is

supposed to silence thoughts. The fire that is meant to remind some that sinister powers can survive anything. Kenya deserves peace. The spoken word should be bullet proof. Our ears, hearts and tongues, the same. The spoken word is the only vaccine we have against the virus that causes HIV and Aids. We must open our ears to hear and then our mouths to speak so we can express ourselves and live. It is better to hear a hail of bullet words. We must call sex by its name. The time of hiding behind winds that squeeze was taken away by the cruel virus called Humano, not Afrikan, Immunodeficiency Virus. HIV.

But remember, our house, unlike Grandma En's *was* crooked. Baba's serious face when he said the words our crooked house could not be pointed at was almost comical. Who would not point at a crooked house that looks ready to fall especially if it has people in it? Then I remembered the house was us. It was not the construction. Still, I kept telling Baba we needed a better place to live in. I liked our house, our bamboo and mud house, but it was crooked.

I know that so many of us are ready to build this nation, to build our house. Who dares cut our limbs and make a nation lie low?

To build our leaning house, I know many hands that put wooden poles into the ground, strung up thinner wattle poles across and filled the gaps in-between with mud were at work. I know many hands pasted it with mud. The soft chocolate mud dried. It cracked. It had caked. But the bamboo outside, and the little raw cement and gravel slabs, only in the sitting room, my parent's room and entrance corridor, were admired by all visitors. Few people that entered our bedrooms, one for boys and one for girls, knew that you really had to step far down below into the two rooms. They were a step under the level of the rest of the house but in one house without a staircase. It was a deep step into ordinary ground. Baba always said he would bring our rooms to level with additional slabs, but he did not. This was because he paid his many taxes, *igoti*. From colonial days he had paid hut and poll tax. Exploited, he and Mami, a former teacher, still pay their taxes so that our country can sit on a strong national foundation. Can we give them their dream? They are paying for it and we should hand it over to them even when one cannot buy or sell a dream! Many Kenyans who are earning much more do not pay their taxes. The debate on whether MPs

should pay or not pay all taxes raged for years. And as this debate continued, someone told me that when he was president, Mwalimu Nyerere was called and shown a piece of land on which he could build a house and make it his home with his wife Maria. All that time, Nyerere had not seen the country and its land as his own private property. We call him a political saint without any awards. He translated Shakespeare's Merchants of Venice into Kiswahili: *Mabepari wa Venisi*. He accomplished many things. His face will remain clean in our minds, kind and rested without contortion in death. Who is holding our taxes and mortgaging our country? Will not their faces contort in death? Would they not like their grandchildren to see their face as clean and clear as was Nyerere's?

We know Mwalimu's award would not have come to him from the rich West. We celebrate him at home. The poor West might have tried. We learned to size each other up early and dig graves for some or make tunnels for others. For some dictators the West lay like a bridge over troubled waters. I can see that the huge bridge that the West made over the river Nile so that Idi Amin could begin to rule in Uganda. That is the tragedy of our lands. In the end they tell us 'your dictator'. No one refers to who helped them get to power initially. I believe we are made for better things in spite of these conditions that belittle us.

Rays

When I sat on our bed with a mattress that sunk in the middle, I watched golden rays of light coming through the tin roof. It was great watching particles zig zag all over. I counted them, the particles. I remembered as I counted them at a dry time that the roof leaked badly when it rained. Does the roof of our nation leak? First, you put an old *sufuria*, a big pan to collect the water, or a *debe*, a big square tin! The water filled both up and it overflowed. In desperation, you put a cloth and old papers in the 'ceiling' but this did not work. Finally, a middle-aged man suddenly cycled into our compound with black tar to block the roof holes and second hand clothes of colorful nylon light materials obviously from Asia, to sell. He could

weld anything and was particularly good at repairing tin pots. He called himself *Chiniriira*... the burner, meaning the welder. We nicknamed him too '*burn eri ra!*' and his name stuck as if it had been welded too. His fingers repaired the holes in the roof but that was not the end of rain in the house. From time to time, it soaked us and wet things were all over the house, coming through the cracks. We struggled to keep home dry. Who struggles to keep my country safe?

When Baba spoke, we listened as if we had never heard him before. He told us about digging trenches around houses in Mau Mau times. He told us about his homecoming. He told us the pain he felt thinking of the freedom of this nation being taken for granted. He said the roof of this nation was leaking long before. Nyaga, can you ask if there is a welder out there riding on a bicycle or even just walking along? Tell her to hurry. Oh, welder of hearts and minds, do stop by in our country, get busy with the little things that can put us right, remind us of the sanctity of healing!

My Grandma En was irritated by Baba's pride. Somehow she sensed the liberation fought for our country had not recognized her freedom. She who had never waited for anyone to give her freedom, she who would never lie low. What choices did her daughter have in such a home, so poor, but of a man who believed in honor? Often times, she thought none! But she kept her freedom.

When a nation is called Liberia and it is freed again by woman, no doubt is left that we also can. Yes we can ! You, most of you, in the West have the comfort of analyzing what you call deception, we are grateful for the small straws of hope we see near us. We cannot afford to shun all. Listen Hariri, some people must go into leadership. Do not worry what they say about you. When you begin to talk with your shining beauty. They will even call you a prostitute but that is nothing. You take that title proudly and wear it for so many women who cannot even tell what winds blow against their faces injuring them. Do not be misled. Marry if you will but, to be beautiful does not mean you must be someone's. Someone's property? Never. You are you! When I say, *Kenya, will you marry me?* I do not mean to be possessive. We believe in the freedom of marriage.

Remember that when they tell you that your thighs are gorgeous that they are thinking of more than you. That when they tell you they can be good donors, they too are looking to gain something. Do remember that in the village, when they tell your sister to bring dowry and marry herself because no man has come for her yet, remember to remind them that you can just be yourself and be well. Remember it and scoff at their thoughts with great subtlety. You do need more friends than enemies.

Dignity

Grandma En once traveled many miles to come and tell Baba that her daughter would not live in such a hovel and work so hard for him and his children. She had threatened to take Mami away from this so called well established family saying they were vain. She said she could do without clan pride. She said there was no pride of belonging to a clan if you did not progress in values and in money, two things she distinguished very clearly. Not held back by traditional distance from in-laws; she shouted what she felt hurt her and in her screaming was her health. She told them that she did not need their donor aid when she was bringing up her child and that now she could do without it and work for herself and her child to live well. She would later treat Baba to much debate. Happier discussions came long after she felt her grievances had been heard clearly. She died at a ripe old age, not from cancer or ulcers. If you must, shout at the trees to keep well. Most of the times, if you know what you want and you go for it without fear, you will be well. Fear kills. Hiding your desires eats you.

Our country's constitution is part of our body. It needs to shout who we are. It needs to express us and deliver justice lest we wither away with disease and die. Our constitution is only written in the *katiba*, it needs to become part of our body, our soul and mind. When something is not fine with the body, the whole of the body feels it and responds. Sometimes it demands rest, more fresh juices and nutritious food. Other times medication. We know when we are not well even before we wake up. I hope this is still not news to

you. We do not have to beg to demonstrate on the streets to tell you what you do wrong! We do not have to beg you to allow us to comment on the beauty or ugliness of this country, we are the mirror, the bead that speaks and sings. We wish to know which important guests, especially presidents, visit our country and why. We have beautiful daughters and sons to protect. They are here with us. Pamoja, Hariri and Nyaga know this. De Gado and all the others too. We stand for justice and freedom. We do not want our people to be trafficked.

“Nyakehang’iii!” shouted Grandmother En calling Grandma Em. Nyakehang’ iii sounded bad, even insulting. People allowed expression of hot feelings to bring themselves to peace. It means, “You of the big earlobes!” But how could two grandmothers fight? Grandmother En would tease Grandmother Em for wearing traditional earrings which she derided. She disliked how her age-mate had mutilated her ears to fit in hanging earrings. Age-mates can differ in taste and opinion. This is boldness, Hariri. En saw Em enslaved by certain traditions for sure and wished to liberate her. When my parents differed, I would advice Mami to run off to her free Mother. She would for some days, but she always ended up coming back to us and Baba. It was certain she always returned home with greater dignity. For sure this going away helped her to heal before she came back.

How I remember the kindly face with which my mother looks at me. When we meet, we sit and talk and sing and our conversation becomes eternal. She sighs thinking of our country, I and Grandma En, her mother. We are joyful before the news is broadcast. After the news, mournful clear beats that are easy to hum precede her voice that breaks into song-*Macho yanacheka, moyo unalia.... Macho yananacheka aiiiiii, moyo unaliaa, nikimukumbukaa wangu maridhiwa... Chozi lanitoka, kwa zake tabia... chozi lanitoka aiii....kwa zake tabia!*

Nyaga, Grandma En traveled many miles like you. You are a troubadour. Though she was local, Grandma En was a woman from a far country wearing wooden Swahili sandals. No wonder she searched far and wide to recognize a man. Somewhere, as the night winds rustle the grass, tonight, under the foot of Kilimambogo, lie her remains. The woman who once lived in a village called Kangoya Ga Athini, Kangoya of the poor. A village still near Kiabuu town. I

know she clutches peace with the thin elegant, now skeletal fingers that did so much. I know that her teeth are still intact on her. She never lost even one. Now as I speak, I can see what fabulous and sensitive lips she had. The right one trembled romantically and looked great just before she broke into a smile. The smile hid in the middle of her upper lip.

Now she lies alone where she chose, in the land of the ostriches that walk tall. Grandma En lies where she chose to be buried . They took her there, but, she, chose, to be, buried there after being offered to return by her child. Change. She opted for her new village named Gatuaryaga for her everlasting bed. The ancestral land's spirit allowed her to roam wherever she wanted and to sleep wherever she got tired.

We are seekers we are, and we respect troubadours! Gatuaryaga literally means where Ostriches cross borders; break them perhaps or where the ostrich traverses. Ostriches may hide their heads in the sand, and in many of our traditions we may remain adamant in giving their name Nyaga only to men, but you cannot keep ostriches from leaping across savannas. Freedom is marvelous in nature. It is truly wonderful when it flows in one's blood. It flows in us in life and in death. It is ours. Have you seen our power? Do not forget it was only born after we learned to be free in opening our doors to neighbors of different backgrounds and serving. I hear you starting to clap, Eboni. Good.

Women in the ring

Savaiva, women have never had an easy life. Do no be cheated. Many of them in marriage are as if they are single. When we speak of hunger, let us count how many hungers we know. The meeting is gathered in warmth to listen to this.

On a dark night, when no bird could be heard chirruping and no cricket singing, Mami had all of us helping to keep the fire burning. Constant fire fanning with a wide tin pot cover ripened the burning wood. The big brown traditional pot finally boiled in a rhythmic manner; and no sound of the night, not even that of the passersby, could be heard. *Huuuummmmmmbuuuumuguluuu!!!* went the pot as we all threw in thin pieces of wood into the now all-consuming fire. We took turns to do this, as my sister hinted that people who sat too close to the fire and for long got first red and then black veins. This is what happened to the lazy selfish men of the village who had no shame in sitting burning their cold legs all day long.

“That looks ugly, “ Pita said.

“It is dangerous,” Mut added.

The pot boiled on and on.

Today you put Kenyans in the fire, including my challenged sisters, without batting an eyelid. Mut married Mich from the Rift Valley. Now their family has fallen apart, politics entered between the sheets of the bed and brought with it freezing air and pain. There is no joy in having double beds when some must sleep on the ground in tents. Shall we burn a nation that had united in pain and joy, long before the colonialist came? Before the colonialist came we were on our own fanning fires for food and sharing. Did we fight the colonizers so that we could forever sit on our people?

“Hodi!” we heard. The voices of two women in unison rang in the air. There was total silence on our part. We were in the kitchen.

“Kareffffoooo!” Mut said.

Mami’s forehead was a little folded but it eased as what was happening dawned on her. I saw the basket in one woman’s hands had lovely rings of ochre. The hands of these women never stopped, now this way and now that, stitch made and tightened, the round basket grew from a small flat base and quickly begun to close in. We had welcomed them in promptly and moved the little wooden planks for them to sit on. They did. They began to show us winnowing trays which they had made. I was surprised! The trays were made of twisted banana fiber. Once finished they had been smoothed with a touch of sterilized soft cow dung. These trays are used for cleaning up beans and maize in preparation for cooking.

“They are beautiful,” My mother said. “But it is very late and dark,” she added.

“We always go like that Mother of children, “they said in Kamba that was being turned into Kibantu, meaning resembling a little the language we spoke, for us to understand. My mother did understand, and so we too did.

“It is the perpetual dark night of our villages; a darkness which is not lack of light that we fear so!”, one of the women said.

“The night of death from hunger!” She added.

It is a terrible night!” the other woman said.

That was long time ago! And the night is not over
You sold maize and left 10 million Kenyans starving,
6 million of them children.
Before some of them died,
you took their school fees too,
and the world told you again,
that it is not their business,
to feed and school us.

Does a rock not have a better heart?
If you doubt it,

take yourself to Maragoli,
And you will find the weeping stones.
May Kit Mikayi whose name is powerful,
bring you to justice before the Hague can,
and even should you go before.
If you fail the Hague and a local Tribunal,
may you find your gates for
urinating tightly locked up
in the morning.

If you killed people for votes.
May you find them locked in a way,
no doctor can open;
and may you be sewed up,
instead of being relieved,
so you can relieve yourself,
inside yourself,
and not on us again.

We are tired.

May your justice be justice,
even after you are gone.
Reconciliation means nothing,
if you scoff on our ancestors.
Remember that your ancestors,
may refuse to greet you,
at the door where,
no other door opens for V.I.Ps.
I sang this song you know,
many times.
May you remember that your ears,
can also penetrate darkness,
and hear this song all the time,
to remind you of the many times,
you rejected our hand of peace.
Mirembé!

I could see my mother's heart filling with familiar compassion. She began to ask my sisters to look for sacks, rags and clothing so that these women could sleep in our kitchen till morning.

"They are strangers," Mut said. "Mami, is it safe for us?"

"Yes," My daughter. "Nothing ever went wrong when a woman helped another woman, no one is a stranger to us!"

It was unlike my mother to quote proverbs but here she went, "I must tell you what Mumbi said to Gikuyu, "Mutana ndari thu,"

"One who is generous has no enemies." The two women shook their heads spontaneously in agreement. Pita observed that they looked like twins. He also heard that Mami did not always say that it was Gikuyu, the legendary father of all Gikuyu people, who told everyone and his wife Mumbi everything all the time.

It was a visitor with a pen who made people think this is how it was with our ancestors. Our ancestors were different, and I, Change have met them. I have met them! These ancestors are people of the tree in name and worship, people of the waters that unite all of us. The women together said that the Wakamba also have that saying about the generous person. The Waswahili say, "It is blessing to have many visitors."

One of my brothers was excitedly explaining that the Maasai Grandmother Em found in Enkare Ngong received her with great respect and kindness when she went to hire farmland. She told them with what joy the Maasai she met in Ngong received her. The Maasai say, "You only have what you give away!" Enmity was not fanned traditionally. We knew how to make up for our faults easily.

But now Monsieur and Madame politico,

Mademoiselle too:

You have betrayed traditional wisdom,

handed over to us by our ancestors,

you drive a knife in the generous heart.

This is a real curse.

Gorging yourself,

you lose your sight.

The women seemed more relaxed as Mami explained to us that there was a ravaging famine in Ukambani at that time. She said it was not the first time this happened.

Hariri, Savaiva and Eboni, the two women stretched out their legs which they had tried to tuck under the wooden small bench like chairs. They put them together in front of them, always gathering their soft and colorful *kanga* cloth around them careful not to show any skin. The visiting women removed wonderful baskets that were half done and each one begun to move the double threads into a pattern. I stared in disbelief as their fingers danced. My mother said different women came by every so many years. I had never seen them. I stared at their feet. Their toes cried for rest, having covered many miles. Their hearts throbbed and their heads ached. Hunger. One of them had her middle toe tied up with little rags. Hurt and bleeding, stains of blackening blood were still visible.

I knew how that felt like not just because my little finger was caught in the door of our cupboard one day when Pita was stealing sugar, but because raised earth often ‘quarreled’ as we put it, with delicate and bare toes. On a cold day, hitting a toe against a mound of hard earth is excruciatingly painful. Later I would see the wide cracks at the back of the women’s heels and feel mercy. I did not have those. Some joked that they were like trenches in which one could hide a coin. Others said they were like caves. Jiggers sometimes found their way into them.

One of the women moved orange dyed sisal thread smartly making six rows neatly that joined with dark brown and then white and so on. It was a beautiful basket. The other woman had all hers in a beautiful light brown. I could not help it. I asked her to teach me how to weave baskets.

Hariri, look at her fingers and enjoy this beauty. Look how she works. She started first by searching the beads she had. I had never seen so many beads together. Beads of many colors and sizes in my life. I remember that we threw away some red beads. We refused to wear beads that imprison our shoulders, pretending to hug them. We refused to wear red beads that mark us out for stigma. Those broad shoulder beads woven together were the red ones which were worn by a girl who has had a baby and is not married. The scarlet symbol. The woman’s hand brought more beads out of her little bag. They were all mixed together in many colours. They were so beautiful. My fascination which I felt make twitch every fibre in my face made the women happy. It was so intense this joy that it almost spoke out loudly by itself. The women told me that they would

teach me how to speak to beads. They told me that making a necklace and earrings and arm and leg bands is not a mechanical act but a way of speaking to the body through beads. They told me that in their language, they did not make these things. The art of bringing them to be was in their language called in a long phrase, 'anointing the necklace or the beads'. It was not about making a necklace. It was a commitment to breath life into happy beads that would then speak to your neck, your ears, heart, your waist, your feet, your arm or your ankle making you a bead.

The beads made for the waist also helped make babies happy. They were to the baby like a song from the lips of a pregnant woman flowing down gently to the womb making the baby learn how to open up to joy. They were bead songs making the baby dream about the future in music. The power of beads melted men. I make many dolls and dress them in many beads as they learn to count them. I sing to these dolls in the womb so that during labor they sing back to me and at delivery they are recorded. I have sang to them every year and every instant of their lives, when they sing to you, listen keenly. The beads are with you, even when you are not aware.

If my fingers can work my sister

If my back tires under a load,
Mother,
daily like Ilmuur,
The donkey of Limuru,
why do they take our sweat
till we starve?
Do I not deserve to rest?
does not the donkey fall to the dust
and try to have a massage, lifting its legs
does it not deserve peace?
Are we not mirrors on every breast?
What is a beast?
Sister, my feet can work joy.
Sister, it is not if my fingers can work.
Sister and Mother, they do.

Grains of maize

De Gado was made from a maize cob. Yet people used to ask him if maize could save anyone. That was not simple teasing. It was violent. Hunger is great violence. The pain of helplessness is terrible starvation. The women who carry beads for long distances are very hungry. At home Mami prepares green maize to boil by removing only some of the leaves around the cob. She never removes all the green leaves off soft maize before boiling it. She only takes some of the leaves off. It is as if the white grains of maize always told her to cover them in green for our own good in food. She also always leaves the silky “hair” on the head of the maize to boil. She likes boiled maize because Baba loves it. When she is not cooking much of it but is boiling hard maize and beans which she has stored from other seasons, she always puts in a little fresh maize at the top of the big pot. It is a little treat for those who are too hungry to wait for hard maize to boil and cook. There is no pressure cooker here yet.

Green maize cooks and is ready earlier, even when cooked over an unpredictable fire. The beautiful green aroma leaving the pot penetrates the smell of smoke delighting the senses somewhere between the mouth and the ear. Soon the soft boiled maize lies on a huge plate. My mother serves the women first saying they are our visitors. They eat quickly and ask what filled the rest of the pot that was still boiling. They were told it was hard maize boiling together with dry hard beans and that my mother was preparing potatoes and vegetables to make a mashed green salad, *mukimo*. Both the women without any hesitation said at the same time; “We do not eat mashed food.” Mami asked Mut to serve them first a little green maize and then *githeri*, that is, loose maize and beans without the potatoes and vegetables mixed together. They ate and finished just

as the green mashed *mukimo* was being served out of the pot with the container that is half a calabash so clean and dry. The lovely salad, green mixture with beans, sat well against the beige dish that served as a large serving spoon. Again the two women said in unison, "Oh, we do eat mashed food!" They had said that they did not like the mixed food but still hungry, they tried to eat and store food for the night and for tomorrow comforting themselves a local proverb; "*Mbui ya kunengwa ndisisyaamo maego*". You do not look for defects in a gift goat and if you see them, you keep mum. Instead they consoled themselves with other proverbs about how difficult it is to keep the body satisfied with food. This is something that you do not understand if you always have food to eat each time you need it in your house. The next morning the women left at dawn after eating porridge; taking tea and sweet-potatoes. Mami dug the sweet potatoes out of the dark earth early in the morning from our little patch of land. It is a great pity that land was divided according to the peoples, which meant a geographical location, and that the British made these internal borders permanent. It meant some peoples were always faced with hunger.

You did what these women were doing at your own risk. Some groups of people, speaking the same tongue, then lived in concentration camps of hunger. How the women wished they could discover ways of keeping the body quiet and always satisfied with nutrients. They knew the only way for them was in finding food to eat. They spent their days walking the earth, showing the beauty of beads and fascinating the people who looked at their fingers dancing off their beautiful bags in the motion of weaving so that they could get some food to eat. Finding food and storing it, this was their agony.

It is still Grandma Akitelek's plight today, 40 years later in Kenya. I saw her rib cage in the newspaper. I did not sleep for a week. This tall woman's death sentence was written on her forehead. "Death by starvation due to corruption, not failure of the rains."

It happened then, it happens now,
but we shall not watch this forever.
Grandmas without food to eat,
Grandpas now with loins sagging,
as you dole out to supporters.

Your supporters live where,
they can store maize and beans,
and yet you give them yellow relief maize,
to add into their food,
so that they can give you a vote?

My head shakes endlessly. You would sell De Gado for votes, if you caught him unawares. I am so happy he is alive to his rights.

How shall you ever cure a land of millions with hands held out? Why should we get yellow flour from abroad, packed with dry vitamin A, when we can grow carrots outside our houses? Grandma Akitelek starves in the dry northern region of Kenya, when we know that for years, we have promised food to grow there. As her intestines try to digest berries that carry death and she develops convulsions, why do you smile at the airport and pat your foreign currency warmly?

Bead women leave

After the two women left, other villagers told us they had seen these two women at sunset. They had been sent away from many homes but they knew they could spend a night at our home any day they came. Change is born of sacrifice rooted in our ancestors. Some of you live on damning the West and human rights for you do not know that Afrika and Asia confessed human rights, many years ago. You will tell me that the West put the universal human rights down first in 1948. I agree. Only that I would like to remind you, that even then, women and children, people gifted with melanin, continued to be left out of the game.

I wish to remind you that Ubuntu is a serious philosophy in our roots. It has been violated in Africa, I know, but when am a person because of the other is, nothing can take that away from me. No enemy can penetrate if I believe I am because you are. Afrika should have taught the West human rights. We will look after one another and break barriers of the race economy that embraces the world. The question is first to my own African, Kenyan politicians.

How well do you know Afrika if you excuse abuse and poor practice on behalf of a culture? Many of you got to the top by mistakes of history buried repeatedly in you. You will see the change come. Yesterday's slave is today's lead person, yesterday's house cleaner is tomorrow's king who serves without a show of regalia. You might have seen them crouching there and thought they did not know a thing. You might have seen Afrikans salute the Arabs, the British, the French, the Germans and others in trembling and think they did not know at thing! I fear for you, not for them.

I go back to the women. Some of the people had seen these women as intruders, two beautiful women walking one behind the other; each with a *kiondo* on her back because the people too had nothing to eat. Material poverty tries to steal our humanity for a time. Excess wealth unshared, kills it completely. Our Mami and Baba, had just a little more, but they shared all that they had. They shared their dreams, struggle, laughter and song.

The two women walked on. They were slightly bent as in their baskets they carried other baskets and winnowing trays for sale and many beads for bead work anointing.

In their hands, they have two sisal strings twirling in busy work. They walk speedily as they weave their baskets fast too. When darkness falls they are still on the road not knowing who would agree to host them till sunrise.

Kenya watched many such women die. Conversations in State House were on thick lips, welling from deep within well oiled necks. They were discussing the finer cuts. How to find the fattest cuts, the softest, to eat with friends. How to treat this and that ambassador, give servants of friendly dictators some prime land near Parliament. Kenyatta had friends. Near State House there is a sign post: Nyakinyua Investments. Votes are matriachal but for patriachy they serve. Tito had to be honored, Yugoslavia being so far. And Haile Selassie's throne in Nairobi is mighty big. Nikolae Ceausescu visited the Papa and Mamma of the country in the eighties. Singers sang to *mtukufu*.. glorious Papa of the nation, Moi.

Kibaki's roll call of visits is hid from the public. One Omar Bashir on the day the people of Kenya gave unto themselves a constitution is guest. But hush, they say, why do you not forget

some things? Ahmadinejad receives Kenya's protocol when the Dalai Lama is twice denied entry. Everyone says it is all about trade. In Kenya we talk much about boosting ties not peace.

Look keenly at who owns the wetland that surrounds State House. Look today. Ask if you cannot see. Family hands hold over State House, public property inherited.

The two hungry women are still moving. They move fast in spite of their hunger and thirst. Some day someone will pay for this, but mainly those in power. They said all women were taken care of by their husbands at home. Do you not see them walking alone? Those women who get a little from husband or politician, must dance the soles of their feet off. In time even their food will be stolen. Taken out of their mouths.

And I say,
On your way to the other world,
Mother Earth also repeats after me:
May you have to step in their *nyayo* of
the pain of the sole of the feet
held against hot earth.
May you know how it feels to be
Hungry and shivering and dying everyday.
On your way out of this world's luxuries,
May you know what is a cold as before buried in the stomach!
Fuata nyayo! Fuata nyayo! Fuata nyayo!
Follow and fall in the womens'
footsteps of sorrow.

Yours was a loving womb, Mami

Ang' wondered if we ever helped anyone else in our home. I told him that if you never did that- help- you just could not live. Ang', it is 9am when the sun dances with sweet greetings announcing it will get much hotter by midday. Before we finish our tea, lonesome Wiki, the man we baptised 'Charia is all alone' is at the door again with his huge swollen feet. They look like elephant feet. Wide clumsy thick fans. They are full of black holes that jiggers have made homes in. My sister says that he has elephantiasis. His thick legs are almost bursting with wounds he had tried to bandage here and there with rags.

Mami always looks at him with deep compassion. Sometimes I feel as if this depth could recreate Charia suddenly changing him into a dancing young man. He says he crossed Chania on his own and ended up in a poor rental house in our village. It was already a bad sign that people were renting houses in villages. They were the Internally Displaced of the Day. Then the Red Cross and Crescent did not know the little roads to villages near Nairobi then.

Charia Wiki - He was swollen and his feet full of jiggers filled the village paths. Cherita sat him down. She warmed water, salted it and took clean cloths. She removed jiggers with a safety pin which she sterilized by passing the needle's tip over a little candle flame. She lined up the thick little whitish bugs which she removed on the wooden seat as if for punishment. They looked like small bags full of something. She burnt them up. She cleaned him again and again in salted water every week. I think when Wiki looked at Mami as he spoke to her leaning on his walking stick, he saw a goddess. Who else would want to be the mirror of such a man but a goddess? Who else could see his shining image in his shriveling and rotting self

but a god? Who likes to see human beings when they are not shining with the freshness of a new birth or after a new bath, apart from gods in whom a fountain of compassion bubbles constantly?

I think when Mami looked at Wiki's ragged and greasy long coat which he always wore, she saw a prayer sculpted as a man. A "fat" man, but "fat" with disease and loneliness, Wiki was. Disease does not always come to the skinny. Wiki must have looked at Mami again and seen that hope is a woman with her mind and heart in the right place, woman who is a goddess in pain. As the Maasai say, he saw that giving revealed more of who the giver was than the receiver. But the world does not think it gives because giving is important for it. Loans have become a disease that might be worse than the inflictions on Wiki's body.

Ang', I speak to the powerful. You have power. Give Kenya hope and faith. Heal her. Let people work for money. Make institutions and people work like the pushcart and its owner. He or she who pulls a pushcart, *mkokoteni* packed with goods has a living relationship with the cart and with the goods. How else can you relate with something you pull with the muscles of your shoulders? Work as hard as the *mkokoteni* haulier does, in your government offices. Do not sit in your State House or Parliament office counting your cattle, wives children and goats. And the young girls you want to put in apartments on the side. Do not miss sessions in Parliament. But why sit there if you are not speaking sense? The people need an attendance book there to keep governors and the MPs checked. The Senate must be very wise. If not, the MP will haul everyone from the county to the top, making corruption a sharper machete than ever. You the people, we the people must keep them in check. We wish you could look after yourselves, Members of Parliament. If we must look after you to work at your age and in Parliament, who will be left to mark the students' school attendance register all over the country? What will the use of education for all be, if that is the poor example you set? Maybe you will learn something from the Senate but I fear. I fear that everyone thinks one gets to high offices to eat well, holiday at the coast and abroad and to sleep in the office and at home. That one gets high office to manage to pay many women who are pushed worse than pushcarts, *mkokoteni*! If

you look back, you will see the aging of your villagers who are deprived and lonely. It is a story greater than any other. It yearns to be heard.

Stretched out

Ang', before the month ended, Mami sent my younger brother to check on Rigori, another man renting a room alone in our village. My brother came running back in deep shock. She said she found him dead and stretched out. Mami ordered what she knew was best. Not flowers. Prayers and a mass for him. She arranged his burial. No one knew his family. The villagers buried him led by Mami. Mami was in the church that did not chant the Gregorian chant for Regori. She sang for his soul *The Requiescat In Pace* in Latin as she planted her maize and beans for a week. She also sang *Libera eo, Domine!* A hymn in which she reminded God that he made a promise to Abraham. I kept asking her what *libera* is. I could hear in it liberation and I was happy. I thought it was something we could also do.

The church suspected suicide. This was the church that did not bury people who committed suicide in desperation, except when a daring priest defied the law. And there was one. Fr. Dudee we called him. He insisted on knowing what the person was saying last if they were found dying. If someone reported that they mentioned God then he went over to do the rite. But most suicides happen in secret. We are not there, we find them hanging down, too fed up to speak. Nobody ever came asking for this old man Regori, whose local language name he concealed to his death. Who was Regori my soul still asks? Had he come from a neighboring country in trouble and mastered the local language for refuge? Mami did not care about who he was or even about his roots. She cared about who she saw bent over before her on a village path one evening, long before he died. She saw a lonely person in great need, not a different country or a tribe. I learned how to sense loneliness in a person from her. I do it the way mercury detects warm temperatures. Mami moved to help. She gave her soul. I give what I can.

If you do not send out sensitive and personal feelers into your nation, it dies while you feast. People look alive but they will tell you if you will only listen, that of pain they died long, long ago!

Somehow Mami sensed everybody's problems including the old deaf man who still grazed his herd on little paths in a land that had long ceased to be grazing land. His cattle almost always ended up devouring our soft green maize as if they liked to see Mami running to tap his back. As if the cows liked to see Mami trying to talk to him and his wide and wonderful face beaming and laughing with her, not understanding her concerns. I turned around one day to find Mami looking furious and chasing him and he chased the cattle hitting the poor things hard on their behinds. Tail up and cocked a little away from the backside the cows run. Two of them opened wide and let out wonderful smooth and green dung. Later Mami would pick up her cake of manure- her only gain- as she decried the maize trodden on, broken and lying low.

As soon as she faced him all he said was, "Are you well teacher?" and he grinned. He would not hear her screams for her maize. Sometimes he and Mami just laughed and laughed as none understood the other. He must have seen her lips move or heard some little sounds for what he said had nothing to do with what she said, but he knew she was a teacher and greeted her always, "Are you well teacher?" Mami told us of their vivacious dialogue in which she tried to dramatize her complaints but he just laughed. The two ended up just laughing together so much that even as she told us this story, she laughed till tears left her eyes.

This old man- before his beautiful daughter with a gold coated incisor returned to our village from an island at our coast with a Dutchman for a husband- always had morning tea and bread with us in our kitchen at Mami's orders. The deaf man's Dutch son-in-law when he visited was surprised to see how we put the only jam we had on the slices of bread that his father-in-law ate even when we never knew when or where we would ever get another tin of jam from.

Later we were to hear that jam is used on bread for afternoon tea and marmalade for what we called morning tea before we heard that it was breakfast, and *kifungua kinywa*, the opening drink, in

Kiswahili. It is still morning tea for us. Morning tea. This is who we are. When the tea has a little bit of milk and no sugar, we call it nylon, not Ceylon.

The herdsman was at peace at our home. He looked like he was sitting at his own fireside so early in the morning. Did I hear you say egg? An egg was a precious soft meat that we ate whenever it was found. Eating it was a short, soft ceremony. Oh yes, the eating of an egg. It was my brother who first brought a Caucasian man home and then I saw how carefully his egg was made for breakfast. I remembered my eating doll. Bacon did you say? Today in the second millennium, a pig farmer cannot afford to eat sausages and bacon with his wife at home. He buys some only for himself in a restaurant for any meal. His wife will discover her own tricks of getting to eat soft meats. It is private, not family business.

When you stuff yourself with soft meats,
abroad in hotels,
at home and,
at coasts faraway.
When your buffet
must be ten plates,
and you do not even
want to see greens and fruit-
you say they remind you of village ways,
especially the pumpkin.
When you want to eat artificial foods,
all the time.
Fast foods that make you slow.
When you sit and poke pork with knife,
and fork again and again,
when you stuff yourself with beef
the world can slice.
When you glory in knowing,
different cuts and wines;
and other drinks,
naming cheeses,
whose names
matter more than
their short stay

in your stomach,
remember where I come from,
is where you also came from.
Remember our destiny is not so unique.
We all kiss the soil one day.
The soil furiously covers us,
in hard clumps as we hide in a box,
still believing we sleep.
Understand me when you see me,
the river passes swiftly
barefoot sometimes.
When I wear a sack,
and sit and think.
I do not know what to say to becoming.
It's gone before I open my mouth.

I am looking at Mami's scheme of work for class three in Mathematics, Kiswahili (KSW) English (ENG), Geography and History lessons. It is very old and faded... you know that green cover of an exercise book after it has been in the Afrikan sun? Focus. She knows her aims and objectives. "Children learned about their names and meanings. Reading and writing. Children must read fluently and free of mistakes in Mother Tongue, English and in Kiswahili. They also take dictations and learn who the chief of the village is. The police officer, agricultural officer, health inspector and even the nurse at the government hospital are arms and legs of the government. Children learn multiplication and division. Remainder one and three and where it goes after you divide. To get five shillings then you will need 3.40 plus 1.60."

If you find the book of the teacher from your family, it will be the same. Your uncle was a teacher? Check his books.

But today the politicians forget how to add up 5 billion for a year of free primary education. They take 2.5 of it. In one instance, 103 million shillings have gone missing. It has gone into strange business. They are selling imaginary things.

Less children can then go to school,
the cycle of dependence grows.
When you do let them go to school,
multiply the math work for universities,
and jobs too.
It is hard for countries that developed on our backs,
It will never be easy for us.
Chile pushed some frontiers.
People ground their teeth with effort.
To have freedom and development,
without dependence,
takes the energy of the big five,
and all the small animals of the earth.
Invite all trees and rivers.
This battle you cannot win alone.

Mami's days

That was at the time when teachers were not to cross out anything or show evidence of rubbing even when there were rubbers in the shops. They used razor blades to clean up misspellings and did not leave a trace of the act. Rub gently.

They planned to succeed. Mami planned to excel. Kenyatta's accounts were crossed out and erased carelessly in many places. Kenyatta did not plan to give us a Kenya in one edition. He worked with a kitchen cabinet; making national decisions with friends in the business of making wealth; often without virtue. He betrayed the cause. Eboni and all of you, never allow yourselves to turn your backs on the good of the common person who is in the majority. Do not forget that there is no majority without the individual who is sometimes a majority through the eyes of my mirror.

Listen, Wiki was not alone after all. If you do your math well you will find him all over Afrika. There were many like him.

Regori too was not alone. Many chant his tunes and would answer to his life's pattern even in the western world. The deaf herdsman had progressive hearing loss that no one detected but he never forgot

peoples' names and their work. His greeting always ready on his lips, "Teacher, how are you?" I know you thought he was a curiosity until I woke you up to see how much better he is than your cabinet minister. The minister becomes deaf to the peoples' cry as does the Member of Parliament. They are both deaf and blind. See no people. Hear no people. The masses are an abandoned people. I did not create these stories to show men at their worst. This is how my life has been. Now, looking back, see how men take power, and yet, see how men always rely on women for their daily liberation. Will they not let the women then liberate Kenya? Will they not hear them as she chooses who and when to marry?

Today the higher education minister says he is not sure of any contribution those who are in humanities can make to the overall development of all of us. Languages, literature, humanities... these things do not make money. The school of thought that taught us that even if to live we must eat, digest and go to the toilet, to be does not always mean to have everything, is closing down.

Mami, I shall construct a museum for your exercise book at home one day. It will be my temple.

Stepping on sun-baked mud

De Gado and Achieng', tell Ong' and Umoja that the entire world is here at home. We do not have to go far to see it. It lives here in our villages. Yes, even the skyscrapers of big cities are hidden in our sands. Big river ships and planes too. All we need to do is to discover them.

Stepping on recently dried brown mud on the ground outside on the little path that led to Teacher Anna's home, I saw how the sun had cracked the wet mud surface as it dried it up. That piece of cracked mud there looks like the map of a country whose frills kiss the cold sea. That map I had seen at school even before. Those are Holland's windmills. The other crust here looks like the map of Cuba. That other one, like a boot full of loot is the shape of Italy. Some of these mud maps are just about to be this or that country but small changes make their borders unrecognizable. Perhaps they should all melt into one large black forest cake, dark chocolate, but I know that many say the borders must remain. The people must move across borders. Humans have never liked to be caged. That part there you see there, chopped off badly in one corner, is almost Uganda, but now it is not a complete map of Uganda. An island is floating back to Kenya. Somalia is here but in many pieces. It is a nation that defies and defines borders with tongue. Look at Botswana, Chad, Mauritania, Ghana, Liberia and Nigeria. Egypt up there with Tunisia, Morocco and Libya. Down there is Saharawi. These are the lands that sometimes reject Africa down there. Should one forget their waist? Does one forget their stomach, womb and legs and those feet in South Africa's pain? Do you say freedom ended or it has just begun? Below the waist of Afrika are Mozambique and Angola, they flex fast. Zimbabwe lies grim in one mush of caked and folding mud but it will rise with Afrika's baking

powder unaffected by eastern spices, but smelling their aroma. Vigilance is a call. Even Kenya is here. She is in her own Kenya. She looks like she is baking with fuel from the desert lands of Sudan and Libya. But in the ground of the caking cracked mud of Kenya many countries lie here before my eyes. Everything is here. Resources and high possibilities are here. Sinking low is here and easier. Flying really high here is possible. I look at these earth maps as I walk over them. I stop. I stand. I think. I look at my foot.

This time, my wide rimmed toes spread over several countries of Afrika. I am not stepping on any map, I am standing on our land. My entire Afrika is here. My big toe touches Italy. The others point out to the world. Barefoot I can take my country anywhere. You see, for me her shape is a heart. I love her. I remember the days I used to fly. I am so happy to just walk.

To the elected leader:

Why does not your power make Kenya fly?

Is this the Prime Meridian (PM) destination?

How deep is your heart Mr. President?

How much do you big ministers and small ministers
love our soil?

Look at my land and revere it.

It has everything even if you see it
only in mud today.

It was the mother of math,

I promise in the North.

It was the mother of music,

I promise without tricks.

It was and is the mother of Humanity,

I promise Human rights were at home.

Before 1948. I know.

There was resistance long ago.

Before forces of slavery set in,
from the east and then the west.

I know our ancestors sold,
but there stood a willing buyer.

And even then,

It was not our norm.
Disease kills economy,
before people are sold out.
Sold by their brothers
to oppressive rule,
they hit,
and rough you up
with tongues that spread fires,
tongues of fires!

I know who fuels those.
And whose little hands they stretch.
I know how disease came.
I know how food was named.
I know how dictators were born and,
and how they crossed big rivers,
I know who fuels those.

It was as if the sun at mid-morning was making little green grasshoppers dance. They jumped out of the little line of green, the grass that divided the path from the next *karialia* and *maigoya* fence. I did not stop as three grasshoppers went chang! Chang! Chang! as if they could travel to those countries I had seen in the mud; to Ghana and Botswana. As if they could meet my favorite thinkers in Central Africa, Senegal, Nigeria, Namibia, Egypt and Congo. I would have tried to catch these grasshoppers with my cupped fingers to see if they could give me a lift and I could ride on their wings. I had to let them fly. I kept my eyes low to see and love the cracked mud I was stepping on. I had to be careful not to fall in so many cracks thinking I had reached a village in a country.

Suddenly I see a mound of green and brown dog shit lying on the brown earth close to the fence. That wakes me up. I do not like it. The shit hides there underneath where the earth does not crack with the hot sun. A grayish slug crawls on the shit. Rude break from my flight of fancy! Later in life, that was like staring at poor governance right in the eye. The slug was in the right place for itself. It would not know or care about my disgust. Politicians found

shade for themselves in the whole world over. Their people may walk and wander everywhere in pain under the sun. They could throw these creaturely slugs out of their place and happily occupy their 'thrones'. A mound of shit would do, if that was what was necessary to steal money. This did not only happen in Afrika.

Keeping everyone else away from resources.

Alienating us from ourselves, our history, soil and land.

They just kept us talking about them,
while they were doing what they liked;
everyday spending thousands of shillings,
every year taking millions of dollars,
the tax of the sweat of our backs-
and brows equals pounds!

I watched my footsteps carefully. My mother had sent me to Teacher Anna and my message to her would just be: "I am here because of what mother told you!"

"Eeeh, karefooo Mwanangu, Ni woka?"

"My mother has told me to come and tell you I have come because of what she told you!"

She entered her cemented house of stone and left me at the little wooden portico entrance waiting. I heard no sound made by a child inside or outside. I looked around at the same time as I peeped in. I thought of the strength of her new house. Her husband worked in a big local government house in Nairobi. There were only four children in their family and all of them girls. They were lucky loving friends. She hardly fetched water from the river anymore, they had a huge tank. And I could see the tyre marks of their pick-up van that had just been driven over mud through their wide gates. Their fence around their quarter acre; that is what everyone lived on, was also powerful. This was a Mau Mau reserve village which was no longer fenced off with *karialia* but with kei -apple. Their own kei-apple fence. Wooden planks brushed with black diesel to keep off ants surrounded it from the outside. Four lines of barbed wire separated by a foot, stung into the wood on the outside fastening any little gaps in the fence.

From the corner of my eye, inside the sitting room, I could see from the entrance where I still stood, happy knots of yellow and purple crochet cloths hanging on a sofa seat. The floor was a shiny maroon color. Teacher Anna emerged with a brown sugar bag. I held it Savaiva, and checked inside. It did not have sugar inside. I did not know what it had but whatever it was, it was wrapped in crocheted white cloth which showed in a little hole in the beige sugar bag. Still, I did not check inside. It could have been knitting wool, cotton wool or just threads, I imagined. My mother loved knitting and sewing as she sang or told stories. I did not think she ever had a monthly period for how would you ever know? Just never a trace even in the hole of the long-drop toilet or *choo* in that corner of our quarter acre! Always so clean.

You may look at a weak house in Afrika
and think it is poor.
Look again. See how the compound is cleaned,
and soils for floors disinfected with ashes.
Cleanliness was always at home.
It is in towns and cities
where many lose care.

Collapsing hut

I went back through the same path but this time I meet Cucu wa Gige who now lived in an almost collapsed hut. We called her Shosho. I was sure her house was going to fall on that day. It seemed to move in my eye and hit the ground so that I even took to my toes and run seven steps before I stopped and walked back. The last time I saw this house, I thought it already begun to fall and I run off to tell Mami. But when Mami went flying there it was still standing but crooked. This house of Shosho was always falling in my eyes. I opened my eyes again and the house was still there. The spire in the middle of the hut which was supposed to point to the heavens, now pointed to the ground at the maize stalks that had fallen down. She crawled out of a hole for a door, and the hole, opposite the

spire looked up to the sky as if it was ready to propel her elsewhere. She looked at me. Her clean shaven head shone in the sun. She wore a wide brown *shuka* or sheet over a brown skirt that hang on her waist from one elastic immersed in a thin belt line. She leaned on her walking stick and I saw her eyes twinkling inside around the black pupil. I looked at her shivering.

“Are you good?” She asked me in Gikuyu.

“Yes, I am good!” I answered. The thought that no one ever wants to say they are not good run through my mind like a black butterfly with orange tinged wings in the midday sun.

I swerved into our compound. The bamboo sticks arranged in neat square meters looked fine from outside. But the home Baba always said was never criticized or pointed at was getting more and more crooked inside. The old hard and dry mud bricks continued to crack all over. Some of them hang precariously and occasionally fell on us like enemies in ambush. How could we invite friends to visit? But still they came. What was supposed to be the front door with its light green frame, the door that faced the rising sun was only opened once or twice a year.

“Oh, you have done it so fast! Did you reach Mwalimu Anna’s?” asked Mami. Mami was happy seeing me back so quickly.

“The hut of Shosho Gige is falling!”

“No. I saw it, it is fine. Don’t panic! Do you remember how we made a new one for Gogo Kenyalin? We will do the same!”

Her quick agile hand took the packet from me. She rushed into her room. I watched as her *kanga* tied around her waist swung from side to side not following her straight steps. She was quickly out again and I saw her forehead lighten. Her oval face was enhanced by the headscarf of shades of light and dark brown and purple flowers that she wore. Her plain blouse was the one she put on often as she worked around the house, and the brown skirt beneath was the one she loved. She begun to hum and sing.

My elder sister’s hand greeted me with a warm cup of tea and two home sliced pieces of bread well cemented with thick margarine. I loved the taste of the milky tea. Somewhere on the tongue, it merged with the sweetness of the margarine. The tea was not too sweet. It was good enough for me to taste the tea. I bit thick into the un-sliced loaf. I munched into it as warmth rose from my stomach to my face.

I was staring at the rest of the tea in the pot held by three well chosen blocks of stone now well smoothed at the tips that constantly took the heat and the weight of the pots.

Mwalimu Anna always wondered how then my parents were able to send me far away to school by train. Mami said it was a miracle that happened for me and her other friend and teacher added it was because she was faithful to her prayers, especially the 'Train prayer, *mahoya ma mugithi*, which is what she called her rosary. I know it was also nature's reward to Mami for her smile in spite of the storms. I do not know what Grandma En said about all this, but she is on a cassette telling about her grand children's education in spite of her rebellion against the coming of western religion which she called the 'priest's religion' and refused to follow it as strongly as she would not get married to a man. Mami tried to take her once and she ducked right under the church pews when the priest raised green branches he dipped in water to sprinkle the people for purity. I suppose he thought she had a devil in her, but smiling Grandma En, only said again that he could not let the priest practice his witchcraft on her.

It is wise to be critical.
Everyone comes in the name of goodness,
and you are so good that you fall for it.
You knew Paul of Tarsus.
His change was radical,
whoever else says Saul was his cousin,
let the roots thrust deep before
leaves of cash are shaken in God's name.
Fruits are the final ad,
they should be in line with the roots.

Different people will choose different paths. A roundabout is my bead. It has different exits. The freedom walk I abandon not. If we meet at a roundabout, each one will know how to select their lane at the right time to a fitting destination. For us in Shosho Gige's day, the path and the roundabout was the hut. We met there with our hearts not with cars to show off. We knew we could reach the hut on foot but leave through the spire any day and anyhow. This

was our life expectancy. Unexpected paths also rose to meet us on the way. No one counts them as life expectancy. Look from back then to now.

Railway caterpillar

Sister's letter finally came. Just as I was impressed by space before me at the Kenya National Theatre, so was she amazed at my barefoot confidence. I am on my way to a new school. We have finally arrived at the Railway Station, the only one in Nairobi and often called Railways. The old salon *matatu* in which my father sits in the front, saunters to a parking. It finally felt ready to stop moving. Heat emanated from its entire shell. The engine still hums. I step in there and here comes the 'hoooosh' change like a blast. More space, more air and movement. Inside the train station I feel as if am inside a tunnel. I am a child of open space. I see the long caterpillar with different colors which they say is going to carry us. I see all sorts of children who are going to the same school. Suddenly, there is an air of freshness. These new classmates milled around their parents with sweets I had never seen. In my village school, Mami used to get sweets from a friend of hers whose husband owned a shop. And we thought we had seen the best of sweets. But these are sweets from another world. They were picked up from a store in Karen and had been stocked at a government minister's home in plenty. Nonetheless, tears still flow in between chocolate bites as I look around. I have quickly made friends and I have been offered a lot to eat. My thick snack *chapattis* can wait. I am eating licorice for my first time. I like the smell and the strength of its blackness. The licorice my new friend Uro cuts for me was a long and winding one like a black train. Children were smothered with kisses and hugs by their parents. Baba rubs my back as I begin to crumble around him like all children were doing round their parents. I stare at the train. I feel pain. Suddenly another train arrives at the station and I stop crying. I find the wagons interesting. I long to get onto the train.

I get in fast and with other children. I do not remember seeing any stairs. It is fun. But it is time for all the children to cry. I try to cry as hard as my friend does. In the end, all of us are crying like

sirens. The train speeds off. The song of the wagons starts. One mother travels with us to look after us all. She wears a type of dress I have never seen. I like it. It is shiny. My friend tells me it is called a sari. I know the pain of leaving home is mine and am now crying from pain of separation, but to see so many people around me makes life exciting. I have conflicting feelings. There are moments when I just want to see again my maize from home and no one serves it here. There are moments I just want to feel the rain leak through our roof but everything is fine here. The train passes poor homes quickly. There are moments I just want our own words and my own mud maps to see but now my world has changed. I have to accept. I know something new. Movement is a vital part of life.

I know what I must do is bring back a very good school report. Be the best girl. We are going to travel for 15 hours. We wave. First we had waved at our parents. Now we wave at everyone who watches the coaches. I keep going to the window and waving at lonely countryside children who cheer up and wave so back vigorously at me. I think I met many of you before I knew you!

Nyanjiru, the train slices the distance, cold and heat with its song. It goes on and on even after I am tired and want to sleep. Hills before my eyes and trees come and disappear. And down, down below in the valley, doooooown there. I see a big basin full of trees. It is big open space which I had never seen in my life. The Rift Valley held in place by the stillness of a cold morning. It looks like a big basin without water. Suddenly shooting out from behind a hill, I see two big bowls of water in the distance. Lake Elementeita they told me. Over there lake Naivasha. I feel as if I am inside the blue water waiting.

And the train just continued and sliced through the wide valley. Mrs Gandhi sat with us. Her own children were going to the same school. She ate with us in the second class. The train entered and pushed out of tunnels now and then, some of them very short. The Limuru tunnel was the longest. We tried to see if we could sing songs without stopping until we were out of the tunnel. We yelled in different ways but all of a sudden English is the only language that people speak out loudly.

Speaking your own language has become like having foreign and even illegal currency on you. You use it at your own risk. No rules

are written about it, you do not even get a formal punishment like those people who used to get a slab to carry -am told, a monitor- if they used their Mother Tongues. Imagine the word Mother, own language spoken at home associated with punishment. To be punished for stealing yourself, it seemed. If you speak that language, there is just social coldness... ostracizing. Stigma, buds and flowers. You can speak your language and then stay alone only with those who speak it. You see for yourself that it is better to belong with more people but you miss home. I could do without licorice if I could turn back and go home. But the train is moving fast.

Later at school, speaking an Afrikan language I get wonderful apples from the cook. Uro spoke to the matron and we got wonderful sweet *ugali* and green tasty vegetables from the matron. We learn how use languages to get the best from each world.

On the train, we have our tunes and we learn from one another and laugh when we finished. I dashed from our compartment of four and traveled staring out of the window for long. The pears selling at the Limuru Railway station were an adventure into huge juicy softness! I walked up and down the train, smiling at the man who kept order before he could send me away. I always knew how to get what I wanted from grown ups on duty and how to see who else was near me.

In the third class, I see entire families without anything to eat. They are going *ruguru*, I hear them say. I think it means north and sometimes it means anywhere up above. My friend in the village who left for *ruguru* with her parents had died. A pick up van run over her as she carried a big load on her back. These are De Gado's ancestors. They are going west and to the north to see if they could get anything for themselves.

Kenyatta, like the colonialist, has not increased their opportunities after Uhuru. The rich take over forests. They settle some of the people there. They tell them it is a deal. There are rules. They are always to go back to their home area and vote for the MP there. They will always follow his advice on who should be the president of Kenya. This spiderweb is old. Hai! We know it even as the train rumbles.

I have seen something special! There is blue water laced with pink ribbons all around and for a long distance. 'What is that?' I ask myself just before before Mrs Gandhi tells me about Lake Nakuru.

Open before me like a big book, is land full of beige high grass. Wheat. The song of the train continues into darkness. Somewhere the brain switches off and the train takes over completely. Then it stops. I wake up next on a bus students getting off at the school parking.

I do not know how I got used to life here. At school, Joseph the cook teaches me how to say, '*adwarang'o* apple' to him as he leaves the staffroom with some spare fruits which the nuns and staff had not eaten. It means, 'give me an apple', in Dholuo. He always smiled kindly at me and handed it over. I had never seen an apple before. I remember my first bite and crunch and my smile back at happy Joseph.

Joseph:

I do not know if you are Odhiambo,
Or if you are Otieno, Ochieng', Mboya or Ogolla.
You do not see me as a child of other people.
You know my ethnic origin but you praise my work
and friendliness with all.

Joseph, many have failed this test.

You cooked for every race and served all tribes tribe-less.

May the Lake carry your love back to us.

May we know how to be one like all the food we eat becomes.

A month later we fancy dress before a barbecue at school. I like that word *barbecue* but we never used it home when we roasted meat. I ask for a *sari* from a teacher. I like the sound of the name *sari*. I search for the color black in it but not a strand. It shines and shimmers in many colours. The teacher dresses me up and puts a red spot on my forehead. I get on stage. I am told to introduce myself as Mr Patel's wife. Everyone claps. Mr Patel's wife has no female name but no one asks about that. I would have preferred to act Surinder Patel, a single girl, but the dot on my forehead.. they told me meant I was already married to invisible Mr Patel and I had become Mrs Patel's wife, his name. Mami too can receive a letter if I put on it Mrs George. Some people still tell me today to greet Mrs George. Someone is trying to hide all women's names. I like the change of schools but I have no time to select what custom to take or leave.

I know Mami taught well in the village and was very neat but leaving her school was very important for me. We are girls of all colors doing everything that all people do together. I feel happy and I know am privileged. My parents say so. I am proud to remember what it felt like to run off to school barefoot. What it felt like to hit the maps of the world on the ground now dried and cracking with the soles of my feet on a cold, cold morning when the ground was cold and sulking. I could deep within me remember what it felt like to long for something that one never thought they could ever get.

On the journey back home from school Mrs Robinson traveled with us. We were told she had to sacrifice and stay in the Second Class of the train with us. Us meant mainly local Afrikan girls. At last, the nun said, someone had volunteered to make this sacrifice. We had not achieved a decade of independence yet. The others who were not Afrikan had been driven home or were in the First Class of the train where Mrs Robinson would have preferred to be. She ate with them. On our journey to school, that first journey, I never forgot that children of settlers and ministers were in the First Class coaches even when they hardly stayed in them but came looking for fun and life where they could mingle more with the rest of us. Some of them did not want to talk much to us. Many of them broke all the rules of separation and came to sleep and chat endlessly about their sad and lonely lives at home in our second class compartments. We burst out with song and cheer. Nobody, not even myself with my limited English was left out. I remember how my friend Uro would come to me from close behind and whisper in her broken accent in my Mother Tongue which was not hers, *baaeeya, karee kee?* I would look at her and we would laugh endlessly. Nobody could capture our joy and punish it. Nobody ever will.

We were creative and,
ready to break barriers
but the political adults held us apart.
They would not cook like Joseph the cook.
They served food on tribal plates.
To be radical did not mean to them justice.

Mrs Robinson eats in the First Class train restaurant again. She watched over us eating and then went to eat.

What did it matter to me?
I was carrying an award
for best effort home.
I had a book on planets,
to show how far I could fly,
and good study habits too.
My heart beat for home.
I was carrying to them,
a great report.

The First Class Restaurant Car, holds a memory of white starched linen and white soup too for me. I never longed to be there. Everything was too stiff. When we peeped in there, fearfully at first for me, I heard the chink, and shining silver cutlery blinded my eyes. It was like glass that shone in the sun. Its reflection felt as if it could cut me. I was ten. I was lucky not to be traveling in the goods train, De Gado. Some students from Afrikan homes did. They could afford no other.

On this return journey, in the Third Class, many families; uncles and aunts boarded the train. These people I have seen before. They look and smell like the struggle. Pamoja, most of us children hardly cared about the designs of class made by adults all around us. The children I remember who cared for status, were quiet. They were mainly average in class too. When anyone showed off, we called them *pish posh* which meant they had their nose up in the air. No one liked to be told that, so we all tried to be just human and to forget social divisions.

I see your eyebrows are raised. You told me you needed much time with Umoja to explain to him why now in Kenya tribe fights tribe and the battle between the rich and the poor burns all the time in a white invisible fire.

I forgot to tell you this story. It might help you see some political beginnings. We had gone for a walk with other students in Kapsabet town, when someone called me to a kiosk shop somewhere above Gulabs Uniform Shop. School uniforms were imported here although round the corner you had Nytil Jinja Textiles which later closed

down to this day. I am surprised to hear my name being called out. I find Shosho Gige's son with his new and young wife in the shop. He calls to out to me happily. I can see an old motorbike parked on one side with a helmet. He takes a loaf of bread out of his kiosk and says I must have it and take it with me. I am happy to have it. When the other girls from high class families see his gift to me, they laugh. The importance of bread is lost on the rich, in their homes, it is always available. The gesture of giving and receiving is lost on the rich. I wonder did they know what bread meant to the deaf herdsman in our village? I took my bread without shame and enjoyed eating it. I cried when they told me Shosho Gige's son was found mangled up in a wreck in a motorbike accident on his way back to the village. Gige his grandson was so small, his mother so young and beautiful they went back to our village weeping. The Kiosk was closed down. She could not afford to bury him back home. After many years, she visited his grave in Eldoret.

Where is your umbilical cord?

In the Rift Valley, these people who came from far named the land that received them the name of the land they had left behind. Kiambaa. You see Umoja and Pamoja, there is something about humans and the land they first step on after birth. Among some people, it is said the umbilical cord calls you where it is buried after you are born. When we grow up on a land, we never feel like leaving it behind. We begin to see it and name it everywhere we go. People do that. If they cannot find it wherever they go, they become miserable. They forget that the land they name is loved in the same way by others. Kiambaa was where Shosho Gige's son came from. Kiambaa in the Rift Valley is where he lived, so far away from the Kiambaa of his birth.

Together with the people he met there, they built churches and preached and sang in their own language. Nobody led them to develop a culture in which their tongues could marry. Similarly, people love to dress with cloth that they have made. Here, they could not do that. Even the fabrics made from neighboring Uganda were dying.

Nytil ni Jinja!

Nytil ni nguo pekee!

Ahabaha!

The radio sang.

Nytil is Jinja,

Jinja is the name of a fabric.

Nytil means it in unique fabrics!

If everything is getting stolen around a people, they stick to themselves, their tongues and ways. They pass on what they have only to their own. Over the years, the politicians stole their freedom! The people in turn tried to pass on the only freedom they had to their children and their friends.

In the end, they put each other in different infernos. First came the inferno of isolation and indifference. After independence, it was assumed a nation was born, especially when some of these people found land or businesses faraway. The friends of Shosho Gige's son stayed on and their children forgot their home. I remember a drive there. We were left in the car and the people from all the villages came to see us inside the car as if we were exotic beings.

I know that leaders should have seen it coming, we were too young to lead them. The rifts were becoming greater than the Rift Valley. They said they were elders and that they had tribal wisdom which they said we lost by traveling Second Class. They were in first class almost always. Visible divisions are the gentle call for change. When they are ignored, one day they explode. On that day, we say we prefer other explosions to this one. It is not a time to laugh.

Learn to see that before a church goes up in flames with worshipers and little children inside who are thrown back in and killed when they try to escape, many fires have already burnt our minds. Learn to see early the smoke.

But Ang', Eboni, De Gado and all, listen to me. We must learn to protect ourselves. Politicians can walk between fires and on fires without burning. You must learn to make fire proof languages and fireproof sacks for the harvest. You must learn to have fireproof churches and preachers if the waters of the land are not to be burnt up too.

Kenya, will you marry me?

It was a shame to look around
and find no cornerstone at all.
The voice is of some
bishop in the wilderness,
the others slept with kings.
If the waters are burnt up,
Who will stop the fires
we light all around us?

Baba and Mami, Sing for my land!

Pamoja and Umoja, I tell you, you are descendants of Baba. He is your ancestor. On the morning of a public holiday, Baba would shave and sing, shave and sing before rolling up and turning down his socks to just below his knee on exactly the middle of the calf of his leg. You know the part that bulges behind? I learn it was called 'the stomach of the leg' when I was writing this book. The Greeks called it gastrocnemius. Baba's shorts would be just below his knees and go nicely around that thick part of his leg. It is wonderful to wear shorts in hot places and be in a holiday mood. You did not need anyone to tell you he was relaxed. He sang songs that rolled the ancient eight provinces into one long before a new constitution did that. It was as if he wanted to say you did not need such strong divisions. He sang songs of Kenya. He cared more for Madaraka Day, 1st of June than for Kenyatta Day, 20th October. As for Jamhuri Day, December 12th it slowly just became part of the undebatable festive mood of the end of the year. It is a popular time with both children and adults with the Christmas and end-of-year holidays so loved. Baba's face was smart and sparkling after a shave. He had a special lotion to use. The harder days were fading. I saw a little cream for Mami somewhere.

Mami always naturally beautiful, covered her soft hair with a green scarf. You only saw soft and curly edges of it, just like today when it has grayed. Now I stare at their wedding photograph hanging on the wall as my mother walks past me barefoot, wearing one of those she called 'home clothes' which are the local version of coveralls. It is her wide brown skirt and old green blouse. A colorful cardigan leaves only ends of the blouse showing on the waist and along the chest.

Hearing stories about my parents own role in the liberation of our nation steeped my soul in silent wonder; the struggle was their life, part of their breathing, loving and singing and even washing. It was part of their faces, etched above the eyes and swallowed by their pupils. It was part of their finest breath and every deed. It was them.

On the screen a movie on Mau Mau runs many years later after Baba's death. On the screen, men are squatting in pain. I stare at it and immediately in my mind the image of the photograph of my parents on their wedding day comes tearing in pieces. I look at the suffering people on the screen. I catch myself searching for Baba among those rows of detainees. The heads run fast one after the other on the documentary. Savaiva and All, I always ask myself. Is Baba that man that sits there staring at a blank future which is his past? I do not know why but I just want to see Baba and identify him there. There among those people holding their own ears in a big queue of men forced to squat. My eyes look carefully at those sepia figures as they got past me. I long to circle one head out of all those and put an arrow showing: Baba! But I cannot. No one named the nameless fighters and so we must, if only with our hearts and lives, enshrine them. We must keep alive the country they believed in and fought for.

So when on Jamhuri Day 2008 we shouted: Resistance! Resistance! Resistance! we were only repeating what we had always desired and what our ancestors before us wanted. The message of the struggle is one. When people asked what resistance meant, we had reason to discuss consciousness. And many people replied: Aluta continua, following Wangui's voice.

On that 12th December 2008, the black T-shirts dotted the field and showed power in numbers. Arrests were made. The comedian people were used to hearing on radio – Mtoto Nyams-wore prisoners' uniform not just to act. He was the loudest statement that those barriers we make in life should not exist in a free land. He was saying we are all prisoners in this land. He was harassed off the field as he filed past. In a free land there is no acting, people are as effective in life, on the street as ordinary life is. There was no time to roll, record and cut and start again. It was live. Something is going on.

Thank you for that great contribution to meaning in Baba's and Mami's lives. Even Grandma Em and Grandma En would have loved to meet you comedian Nyams, but time rolls on waiting for none of us. So urgently must my nation grow.

Kenya had been like a silent prisoner for long. Many comedians spoke for her not only once. It all started with the freedom we found in laughing as you imitated the tragi-comic lives of our leaders. You made us laugh and you made the ancestors bend their stressed out necks forward and release life from their chests in gusts of laughter from deep beneath the ground. You made many swallow criticism. De Gado just keep your tongue and finger moving. Before Redykluss genre, which we call *Nyanja* in Kibantu, we had given our ears to mastery listening to as a *nyatiti* player swallows the rift in Mukuru kwa Njenga, a slum, sowing his seed of pain and laughter. His song expands from Akiba in Kibera.

Nyams and your Breakfast Program –Ex, do not watch your backs. Watch the front and step into the ring of power and make our politicians shake. Change roles. Grandma En wants you to speak for her friends the female witchdoctors who are killed in Kebigori. Sharp and honest tongues are in demand today! You did brighten my darkest days. See yourselves as some of those who led the dark day.

On the 8th of December 2008, many people had gone to celebrate and to ask the president why the entire country was in jail without a constitution to stand for them. We had all heard that the independence constitution could not be used to resolve a disagreement over votes in December 2007. We also saw the IDPs still suffering almost a year after the violence we endured. They will always suffer in their generations just as the rich will always enjoy in their generations.

We were asking why we were not following the agreement we had made for peace to prevail. We had been saved by outside intervention. Call him what you will, but if Kofi had not come, we would have been killing mercilessly. We were stopped by a shocked world. It is not me who bad mouths our land. Fire, blood and intolerance have a voice that never dies. Do you hear Elekeingati and Kenyalin? They cry. They speak from the graves. Before they came to help us, on our own we could not speak or sing. We killed.

But on this 12th of December 2008, when we ask hard questions, many are arrested and taken to Lang'ata. All activist Nairobi is on standby. Police are paralyzed. Wangui wants to speak in all languages on earth, she finds herself taking off her bra again. I heard Oulo and King'ara came by there. Less than three months later their bodies lay ridden with bullets.

Mami cried for Elekeingati again. I am not trying to forget. My country should not forget. Assassinated on State House Road. Fear was meant to kill activism. Others began in earnest to look for the constitution all over again. The law. We are less naked when we hold it.

The power of the bead,
you remember,
the power of the bead opened up prison cells.

Mami's story of pain in Baba's detention days and the payment of hut tax lives in me. How were we to let them hold up our lights in Lang'ata facing the cemetery? They were shaken by our power which forced teargas canisters not to explode. Remember activists did not sleep for 48 hours?

No Tax for MPs
No tax for us
Uta do?
What will you do?
Call us liars.
We stood our ground.
Much was wrong in our country.
We refused to pretend and stand by.
Call us liars.
One day, you will see the answer.
There is no puzzle here.
We say what we see.
We sing, even when you arrest us.

Pain was our daily bread

Nyaga and Eboni, back to the past in those days when stories of pain were our daily bread, Mami would always draw me close to her for healing. She told me she held me and she sensed fire. She told me she saw me walk and she saw determination. She told my sisters, not me, that she never can tell what I hold in my being but it was there the moment I opened my mouth. I got Mami to speak up for me. What I remember are endless dreams for a better world carried in the mind. Maybe that is all there is. But many said dreams set the pace. The powerful could steal both votes and money. Mami loved to speak to my imagination. She always told us real life stories too. I do not mind I did not get the majority vote, I did what a determined minority must do to bring Change. I stood up and I spoke. Children heard the secret. Women and also old men. An old man called me a king. That was my finest award ever. An old woman smeared my face with the mud of blessing, mixed up with saliva. That was my real graduation day. She put the map of the world in my eyes again. She is the one who gave me the power, not only to read, but also to write. For my first degree, I graduated happily *in absentia*. The second time, I repeated after myself, that I gave myself the power to do things, like Grandmother En.

Eboni and All, listen again. We always used to ask how Baba came home from detention even if he died so early. Mami tells this story from back in those days when Baba was in detention. "A nun knocked at my door, one late evening. She asked me to host a woman who had come from Embu to try and place her daughter in the school owned by nuns. It was late and she could not return to Embu where her husband worked. She could not travel after 5p.m for she would be arrested. The nuns asked me to host her for the night and I did. It was not long before she begun to tell me of her life as the wife of Embu *Kingu kia Gathigiriri* Detention Camp Warden. My heart skipped a beat. I had just been praying for Joji, Baba who had now been transferred from *Manyani* to *Kingu kia Gathigiriri*. I told her how I felt and how miserable the village and my life had become. She consoled me. She asked me to follow up the school placement for her and to pack something for my husband. I packed for him a

long coat on her advice. Inside the coat, I asked her to tell him I had hidden some beads and that he should pray. The beads shone in the dark. She reassured me of her support. The next day she started off early.”

When Mami tells this story she still cries. Savaiva... you are not the only one who is in tears and tatters. Something frightened the British about the Embu, Meru and Kikuyu bond. Their bond tightened to fight the enemy. Many others were there too, not just in one name, they came in thousands. But Africans began to speak of this and that tribe and not so much about the suffering of the black people.

But on those happy holiday mornings Baba smiled and filled the house with his happy presence. He told us of his last day at Manyani and how he left *Kingu kia Gathigiriri*. He says their bodies were pulped flesh. He says they were forced to hop around on their haunches for many hours and sometimes for a whole day. They had to squat and hold their ears and keep moving when they were not marching to screams for ages in the sun. This is what it took for the sun not to set on the Empire which they had dared stand up against, fighting it back from the bush.

Someone make change sweep in. Each one of us, let us do it in vigilance that never dies, passionately. Motho, a young man in Kenya now will tell you that they still squat men in our prisons today. It is called *Kavaa*. The bird of freedom homes in only in our imagination. We still have a long way to go. When we see real Change, we will not be the ones speaking most loudly about it. It will be the whole world.

In that squatting queue, Baba would say, hesitating for a moment trying to strike one's balance meant immediate beatings. You fall out of line with the others and expect the cracking whip! Hop along and fall. Dig trenches and eat little. Get sick and die working and tired!

Then Baba sighs for long and says, “When the door of my cell swung open in Gathigiriri and I was found on my knees praying. I knew I was finished. I was in prayer and tears as I thought of my wife and read her lovely hand writing. I knew she had suffered a lot in my absence. Here she was telling me to take courage and that she had faith in God and particularly in the powerful intercession of the Mami of God. I was weeping. Was it going to take a Mami to

free us? How was my own Mami doing? My faith was not as strong. Could this Mami rescue us at all? I wondered. Well, my wife loved her. I tried it. I went on praying traditionally too. I was in terrible desperation. We called on the God of our people, our ancestors everyday. 'If we lose!' we told our God, 'it is You who loses!' We knew that the Mighty One would not be beaten and that our own God, was on our side. The missionaries could choose where they belonged. We challenged God and we won!

"How was I to deal with so many thoughts, pain and possibilities?

I heard the shout that I was wanted in the Warden's office. I left my cell with my both hands on my head as was the custom. I only had my torn shorts on. The warden asked me to sit on a chair and he had to say it again for me to hear. I nearly fell to the ground with shock. I sat carefully and still, with my hands on my head as if they had been fixed there by the strongest glue on earth. That was the instruction to us detainees. Unless we were working, our heads were on our heads. The Warden ordered me to put my hands down, but they got stuck there. I stared at him, trembled and my hands refused to move. I was sure I was going to die. My ears heard him but my head refused to take the order. He shouted so loudly that I should put them down. This is how I had been before this authority for so long. Having my arms anywhere else could lead to my death and I did not want to die. The Warden stood up and removed my hands one at a time. He put them down to my lap where they stayed fixed. The Warden then told me of my wife's kindness to his. I was given permission to go to the canteen. In forty or so minutes, I was promoted to take care of the canteen. I had to believe in either the power of prayer or the power of the word of a wife over a man's mind in the night. I was convinced it was the two. These powers had seen me out of my cell into the canteen.

At the canteen I took a beer for freedom- it was called 'Kenya One'. I threw back my neck and drunk. I took it down in one long and free gulp. I lit up a cigarette and breathed in and out some kind of freedom. The other detainees were shocked at the turn of events. Before long, I was sent to Ngenia Detention Camp and from there, I was released for home. That is when my son Pita ran to meet me. That is when I hugged all of you my children, those who were there and those who were to come!"

See De Gado, he would always add that last part because he knew that before he came to earth we were ancestors fighting for another land's freedom. We fought even when we were not mentioned in stories.

Haaiya, Eboni. I hear him now. Baba is still singing and shaving, it is a holiday. His voice clear and fine; his senses explore the many levels of freedom as he whistles along; *Wengi walisema, Kenya itakuwa matata... wengi walisema....* "Many predicted only problems for Kenya. I can hear many still asking, Kenya *itakuwa je! Hatutaki matata*. Kenya should not become a rogue *matatu*. *How will Kenya be we ask? We do not want problems* .

Ten great years?

In the seventies, soil erosion has depleted the land before Kenyatta dies in 1978. In 1973, those men shouting 'ten great years!' out there were not better educated than us, the girls who could hear them as they bragged. We were still in Baba's crooked house and would be for another 15 years. The erosion of the soil. The erosion of education became unstoppable. Now, many did not go to school in order to excel. Not every school was exciting and easy to be in. Mami and some other teachers tried to mother us. Some male teachers made young girls pregnant every month. Sitting on rough benches for hours, taking books out of a tattered bag and having indigestion from eating cassava the night before was hard. Students did not have sweets here. It is ten great years of differences growing in our society.

Kenyatta thinks Nyerere is wasting time talking about *ujamaa, Afrikan socialism*. The cold war is hot and Nyerere will not be a star in the West. In the end, Kenya will have to devolve both power and resources. Kenyatta encourages each one to do whatever they can to make money. If it was illegal and you were caught, just do not quote him and the nation would be safe! What a way to sow corruption, water it and make room for it to grow like a grass called *thangari*. It looks like any other grass but it is not. It thrusts its roots so deep into the earth and returns and returns even when you dig deep to weed it out.

Going to school was a duty many carried out as long as they could. Many fell by the way. I was safely in my train to school with joy. What we were enjoying was so different from what others girls were enduring. They were very vulnerable. We were safer. They told the story of the boy who was bigger and older than the rest of the class. This big boy danced a lot at break time pushing out his pelvis from his waist out. He stole glances at girls which only some mature girls knew were dangerous. One day, he grabbed a young girl and run with her to the maize and banana plantation nearby. He flew like an eagle that stoops and picks up a young chick. All the students run after him. He abandoned her and he fled the village. Everyone said he was an ogre.

Today, how did this Ogre find himself in Parliament? We had screamed and chased him away at school already! We need more eyes and better food so that we can see far. Today must be a better day. At school, we were advised to chat with sister. *Growing Up* was a fine book to read. By the time Abdi came to swagger in school with a car, we had already talked about sex and attraction.

My land and village still bled; but Pita sang with Afrika; *Lisanga bana Congo, eh! Franco, bana Zaire! Rochereau Tabuley, bana Zaire!* He did the funky chicken on the road and took photographs. He brought me a black power fist to wear around my neck! He told me, that freedom was to be fought for all the time. We looked at each other and smiled. He liked me happy. A brother and sister full of happiness.

Patria for Baba means land; but to us even more, sacred soil. It seemed to mean more than trees, forests, rivers, mountains and water towers to these people since all the resources, like our crooked house were to be marked with honor. How did patria come to mean cash in the pocket and as much of it as possible regardless of how it was acquired it, Nyaga?

People who were to be disliked were the enemies of dignity and honor, in this case they were mostly foreign investors, people from the lands that colonized us in Afrika. For them, cash came first. It was not only the people who disliked them; the land did too, for naturally, the land supported justice, dignity and honor. There had to be food and peace. There is the deep meaning to the green and the black of our flag. The land absorbed goodness and hated bloodshed and injustice. Here is a terrible traditional curse to you who sheds the blood of our people, the being of our people: "May you be rejected by the soil!"

I walk thorough many plots of land in Duberi and I find little premature maize fallen on its side. It looks as if it is watching the red and tired soil. I hear no goats bleating. The grasshoppers have ceased to move in swarms. Songs have died. There are no beehives and bees singing near them. Gige has left. There is no natural honey. Communal work has been replaced by picking coffee for a few shillings in a farm owned by people whose names the locals corrupt in pronunciation: *Wati* and *Hebo*.

I have to open my eyes and see clearly. Independence has come without land; and without freedom for us. Mami told me that long ago my paternal Grandfather had many acres of land and many sheep and goats. At the time she told me that, the colonial office only allowed them to plant a banana tree, not more than one, in their parcels of land. Baba always talked of different taxes. I never understood what they meant since he would touch his jacket and then talk about *igoti*. I only knew that he was talking about taxes and not a coat because he would say he was taking *igoti* out when he was putting his coat on. The name for jacket and tax are the same in Gikuyu. It seemed to mean, get modern, wear a coat and pay a coat!

A decade into independence, male voices rent the air in the dark of the night: "Ten great years!", "Ten great years!" "Ten great years!" Baba was on night shift at the airport that day. "Ten great years!" the men were shouting again and again, as if it was a stone that they were throwing at us from outside. The men were drunk. We lived in fear of a possible attack with Baba on night duty often.

Fear. Ten years of celebration by men writing violence on the body of women could easily come to be. Our house was poor but many were cheating that we and Kenyatta shared a house which a woman built. Her name was the CreatorMumbi they said. They said the House where we all lived was ours. They said we voted for one.

Those were the days in which the church urged that the vote be secret. Now, church campaigns openly for this or that man or woman. It may not use words but it receives in deeds and begins to nod to rich men. A man who was elected in the area said we were all represented, in the House of Parliament. He looked at the people who elected him in the day time and spat. He said that he did not need their vote. He said that he would only need two votes to go to the House of Parliament where no simple people went. He already

had these two votes he said actually calling it one. The vote of the first family. This was the first dynasty seed. He was the President's in-law.

It is midnight, 12th December, 1973 and the nation is drunk. We are afraid again and once more Baba is not home. He got his freedom to come home, only to keep working from long distances. This is a house protected by women. We could hear that the male voices were hoarse after shouting in their drunkenness. Would they want to steal from our home which compared to other mud houses looked so well with its façade of bamboo? Would they be thinking of breaking in since Baba now drove a big bus for Kenya Airways and it looked as if we flew? Or, were they looking for girls to lie in the maize and beans plots with? We were lucky to escape. Independence and sexual abuse! If they broke in and beat us up, would they say the big House of the CreatorMumbi had been broken into?

So I ask. For every happy occasion must somebody bleed or take home the virus that leads to HIV and Aids today? The Ten great years was like a spear being thrust into the nation's weak body. Business was going well if you were connected to State House. Politics and friendship and marriage worked as if in a royalty. There was no Aids in 1973 as far as we know. The first cases were found in the U.S.A in 1980. If we had known what was coming and we would have been prepared. Still queries about polio.

The monkey link became a central link. HIV is said to have come from SIV, Simian Immunodeficiency Virus. If we had known we would not have eaten monkey flesh if anyone did. All humans build strong fortresses to keep safe. The monkey, the man and the continent. At this point, HIV is focused on as African. But we have told stories about humans and animals all through the centuries. We have known how to keep alive through the spoken word, forcing the mouth open for medicine. This chain is worse than slavery. Nobody talks of the origins of HIV any more, and we are too busy burying our dead. A cure could have come out of Afrika, but in these things also there are lords. All our faith was taken. People do not invent without support. The cure may finally come, but we do not know what is coming tomorrow. What we know is that we have to be stronger and not weaker also in the word. Well, Eboni, if you go to the internet and search on the origins of HIV, you will be

shocked at the answers you will find. You will find people linking slavery to the disease and us. You will find it at a Yahoo.com address. There are people always trying to wound us more. I mean the black people. The world is so many years old and they are still so old fashioned.

Kenya, fifty years after independence, do we realize we can only win if we truly work at it? Vigilance will take more than we think. My reputation and yours are important. It is best to keep saying where the pain is. Saying it in many ways is better. Let us all face these truths. Can we have presidents who are duty bound? We do not need one person who believes all power is theirs. Can we have politicians who realize that every minute counts urgently, and that everything they do wrong is sadly seen as a continent's sin?

Young Sankara has made us proud, but you will hardly hear of him in the West. Nyerere we talked about before, he was our good man and so he did not become so famous. There were not just a few good people. Famous are the evil.

You smile Eboni. You all smile. Yes, at home we were looked upon as success stories. Mami and Baba were praised. They made sure that every one of us; boys and girls, first went to school where our Mami taught us. Mami believed in all children saying that the ones who looked least gifted, arriving with gray mucous stuck all around their noses, were the brightest because their brains shone clean! I lean on decades of great schooling. Small beginnings we had. I was good at everything Mami taught me. I loved reading with her. I remembered delighting in filling lines of exercise books with *wwwwwww*, *hhhhh* and then *yyyyyyyyyy*. The news of my scholarship to a school in Kapsabet made me remember how I used to feel when I believed that I flew as a child. Traveling to another part of the country was a new wing for my soul. We are supposed to move on this earth, those who want to confine us in homes and in provinces must remember that movement is life to us. When I traveled, I loved seeing a new world. I still do. It speaks to me. I move. I also move in protest. Baba did not fight so that I live like a spectator. You always ask the nasty question, 'who stopped you?' I know how sarcastic it sounds in our languages. You then go ahead and say that I am a bad woman, too much. You did not know Grandma En. When you say you are scoring 100% in protecting my

freedom, I will say you do nothing. You cannot curtail any part of my freedom and then say I have it. Once you steal from it even a little, it is no longer freedom. It is not divisible like sums of money. None of our rights are. An attack on one of them is a war on all of them. In your report card I have to say, you must aim higher. Freedom demands all.

Meeting other people from other lands makes me happy. In secondary, years later, I saw how envious some girls felt when teachers-humble nuns-showered me with praises when I spoke well. They would not have known of our crooked house from the way I looked. Sister Miriam always brought out my essay book first. It reminded me of Mami's book. Sister knew how much effort I had made to be there. One girl threatened me for this. Competition is natural. We must learn to take differences. The girl who ended up becoming a gentle nun so far from my own choices, had formed a group against us. They had heard about my primary school full of rich politician's children. They concluded that I was rich and spoiled too.

Today,
Something steals our land.
Someone has kidnapped our spirit of nationhood,
and wrapped us
with disease and death in lies.
Some people donate coins
into a beggar's bowl,
but would never tell
power that it walks naked.
Nor will they touch a beggar's hand.
The sisters healed the hostile girl.
Our fear of everything,
is paralysis of the heart.
Others give the heart first,
holding your hand and,
opening your sickly eyes.
Cleaning your mucous.
Mami may you be praised for,
shining brains.
Always making sure,

you touch the stars,
your hand harvesting light,
Another to uplift.

Women stand up for our country.
When I look into a mirror and say am Kenya,
I want a true reflection and for this,
I do not have to break a limb.
We are in the majority in population.
We can enjoy our freedom free,
we do not need to sleep with the minister,
to get into power.

Where you choose,
let you be,
without having to pay.
World over,
men will buy dinner,
with hidden costs for later.
Talk straight,
and say what you believe.
Own power,
women have gone before you.
Hold their courage in your heart.

Give your country
donate all you have.
Do not wait for another donor,
from somewhere far away.
We must back home,
making beads of anointing,
like the two women look for help.
Suffer the hunger of feeding a country,
with freedom and justice.

Walk and struggle,
Fly and resist,
until we are free.

Many people are
out to ridicule us:
It had to be in that continent,
they say.

We give them reason,
until our vision burns again.
But above all,

We do it for ourselves.
Grandma A to Grandma, W.
We do not have S, Q, X and Zee
in most of our home tongues.
'C' is alien if hard,
and so why Africa?
Afrika,
let us move again.
Give to your country
what no one else can.
And add a smile,
though the extra mile,
may be in exile,
still give your smile.
Do not take less for whole,
Let them say you are senile.
They spread their bitter gall.

Goodness speaks,
many tongues,
and many speak for it.
Evil speaks for itself.
But you must speak goodness,
beauty and strength to evil.

And you will be first to know,
you will know,
You will know,
that is where the touch

that we are missing might be.
Change and marry Change.
Kenya, will you marry me?
Kenya, will you marry me?
Will you stop mistaking little promises
for real Change?
Kenya,
will you still marry me?

When you see a ghost called change,
Will you run there in excitement?
Will you not remember that,
it happened before?
That they cheated you?
Will you forget,
the mirages of yesterday?

Do you think you can marry change
and not invite your neighbors?
Why do you not marry real,
Change,
and you will see?
You will see how
the continent will shake,
moving together towards
real Change.

I saw a whirlwind,
and people danced.
They called it Change.

It is the same as looking at a shooting star outside. It shoots, shines, fascinates and is no more. Looking back, no one fussed on the 20, 30, 45 years. Fifty is close now and unless Kenya marries Change, I know it will remind me of years after the 20th anniversary, when I searched for Haley's comet. We saw Haley's comet at a distance in 1985, and never knew again when she would return. We were not sure of any of her fellow comets. I dream she comes back,

bearing Elekeingati and Pita on eternal light. Pita left us telling his stories and singing on a comet called Kamirithu. The villagers drama which we never saw again. I hope he comes dancing change.

Gige, we have come to the river but there is no water. The water swirls and grows in that little cement tank that they dented in the mouth of the fountain. I do not know why the water disappears since Mami says that the river is born here. Why is the river dry? We wait for water to fill the tank. It does. It begins to come through the pipe and pours unprotected. It is dammed upstream. The area is covered with fresh green and high green grass. The beaded eggs of the frogs are hiding in the deep rushes. They look like a light colored slippery rosary, they join together like a necklace of life. Their black parts hide life. The black beetles begin to rush out of the weeds and zig zag everywhere chasing little waves in a little river.

I know why the river dies

Back in the village, Cucu Jigger Pain has just picked up her sisal carrier strap. She has tied her green tin barrel with it. A wonderful circle around each end of the two meter long barrel. Each end shows up an elegant knot so tight and fast that the barrel can never slide off. It is a knot that does not get undone once you make it. When she does it to wet wood too, it cannot slide off. The rope from waist to head keeps the bundle of wood on her higher back. It is the knot of burden that every woman in this village has learned to make and to carry goods in. Who cuts and knots her body of pleasure if such pain she already bears?

Once the strap invented and made neatly in Ukambani lies flat on the head, one can go for miles. The back will ache in other years not today. Once the knot and cut is made, to curb, they say, pleasure in her body, she will ache for life. She may die at childbirth. It the starting of death in a human body. All women as all humans are one body in the end. Those who suffer the cut, agree to pass it on. Mami and Baba broke this culture. Ridicule was their daily cup. In the end, they triumphed. Are you going to cut your daughters even after polio has maimed them? They talked to many and begged for reason, but in the end, they said no to it for all of us.

This woman and her barrel of water. She now has it captured on her back and is walking down to the river. It is the dry river and her feet are getting soaked in dry earth. The sand is red and hot; volcanic. Protecting themselves, the soles of her feet have hardened. They can stand the heat. This is Shosho Nobody. Her toes and the soft skin around them hurts very deeply, like the little girls' feet hurt on cold earth early in the morning when she and her friends were brought down to the river escorted by music sadly captured by ritual. The music cries in pain. I do not know why anybody sings in celebration of their mutilation. Today, she has fetched water. Early in the morning, it will be another matter.

At the crack of dawn, at the river of circumcision, song fell off the tip of her tongue the way a ripened reddish mango drops off its stem. But each note in her song is bleeding. Her voice leaves a trail of blood in the cold morning air. She twists her waist and sings. No one stands in her way in those mornings. They sing with her. She is the high priest and this is her church. She has cut many girls one after the other, taking away their most private and sensitive parts on a mat outside the house near the river. All the girls must live there now, until they heal.

Days have passed, years too. Now she worships alone. Shosho Nobody. She fetches water alone. The girls whom she cut had all run away from the village to work in the city. Their heads and hearts told their feet to run. No doubt this deep cut early in the morning made them hate their villages and also other women. From now on in public contests, they abuse other women. Maybe they think this is a force for heterosexuality. But the pain is always there. Even those girls who stay on and get married in the same village feel better when their own daughters grow up to leave the villages completely. They are defiant. But when they reach the city, will there be any kindness awaiting them?

Yet in the past, the blind part of culture made some girls swing their hips after circumcision and boast. They claimed others had to listen to them because they were cut. They were told it was the road to power. These girls acted as if they had high positions and rank. They were being blackmailed. They were cheated.

I now meet Shosho Nobody holding Pain's hand. She is on the unending and winding road. This is the road that I always saw in my nightmares, bad dreams. A road filled with a huge snake as big as

the road. I have nowhere to pass. She can see that I am Change. She greets me seething with anger. She spits to the ground. This is her well collected heavy yellowish- red mucous near my feet. She knows I am not cut. She knows Mami shuns that tradition. She knows that Mami protects our genitals from being cut off. She also knows I dare say 'Change!' and that 'Change' can lead Kenya. She does not like it that I believe Change is a suitor worthy of Kenya. Men of power feel like her. Did you ever hear of any of them who dedicated a book or a life to the liberation of women from this culture? It helped them to stay in power. When I speak to you like this, they say I behave like an uncircumcised boy. I do not behave like anyone. I am this one. Change.

All these things make Cucu Nobody spit twenty times along the way; and a thousand times at my feet. My heart and my brain are in my feet. I walk on. She goes to speak to powerful men behind my back. Jogu, take no offense. We must know who we are before we can change and marry Change. Our identity must be intact.

Shosho Nobody, they cheat her to oppose Change. Change tried to meet her but she refused. Granules of red soil stick onto her wet heels now. Her feet are red with blood. Her feet bake in the soil. There are leeches all over her toes. Mami tells me they cannot be removed unless someone uses a knife or a machete to scrape them off together with her skin. Shosho Nobody sits down on a rock screaming. She is lucky someone is passing by with a bottle of paraffin. The oil travels round her skin along little rivers of her skin, before the leeches are scrapped off. No one takes her to hospital. They say she must be courageous in pain as were all the little girls whom she cut as other older women held them down.

Are you looking? Four long and slithery gray snakes grow out of her head. They are not like hair that could be plaited. They look like the gray she has instead of the whiteness of eyes. The snakes look as if they have been pulled out from behind her sockets. Her eyes have become hollow. After four days when her sores dry up, it is as if she wears ankle -high brown socks inside her skin.

Nyakairu and Ang', when you ask where Shosho Nobody went and no one tells you anything, let me tell you. She fell into her own fire between the three stones in her hut. No one knows there is a

hole there into which she disappeared never to be seen again. She never cut any other girls. The world was losing the fight for womens' bodies, she had to leave. But men cheated women again.

Somehow no one could keep ugly Cucu Dang'i from taking over from Shosho Nobody. She took over quietly as the skyscrapers grew higher than their foundations in the earth allowed. This happened in all cities of the world. The glow worm's light became dim.

The waters are bitter

You know I love you all. I love you Pamoja, I love you Umoja. De Gado, Eboni, Ang' and Hariri, you know it. You know my love Nyaga and Gige, you saw it. If I have to ask you, Pamoja, you who reminds me of Umoja, Unity, in the oneness and the healing of Afrika, where can it be found? Pamoja, will you answer me?

How many years must we bear pain till we know that marriage to Change is worth our hearts and minds? There were hardly any girls from a family that struggled with needs like mine in my class in the wonderful school I went to. They were rich. And yet, their fathers had not fought for freedom and got betrayed with independence. But they had more than us in every way. The doors of the great schools which we only went to by chance opened up widely for them.

Years after attending this school, I found myself in a school for villagers like me. That is where a classmate threatened me. The change was big but I was now more at home. My friends and I worked hard. We were secondary top performers in the country. Even after the hard work, still our rich friends found their way more easily. They left our country and went to study in private universities abroad. Now, some of them have things our eyes cannot look at without burning. Things we have not seen and may never use all our lives. They have sports cars and motorbikes that look like metal horses. They say these are made for the rough terrain that is found in Africa. They speak with tongues that make many say these are not Africans. But they speak about things to be bought. They do not speak about freedom. They do not speak about land. They are not Europeans or Afrikans of the village type. I do not mind how

they speak. No. I care about what they see and think about change. But their minds are caught up in the snare of rolling tongues that speak about high spending.

Uro my best friend at Upper Primary School was a Minister's daughter. One day, when we are still in primary school but on holidays, I call her from a phone booth. It is the only one for miles around. I have had to walk far. The phone rings in their house. Uro says that she wants to come home to our crooked house. She wants to come from the Nairobi suburbs of Muthaiga where they play tennis and eat liquorices to my village house. I shout joyfully. A boy in the village is stalking me. He is hiding behind the phone booth. He spreads word that I was pretending there was someone on the phone since there was no one to be seen on the other side, behind the booth. He says that I should be feared since he hears me, he says, pretend to talk in English in the phone booth like an English woman. He says am changed and strange. I go home taking care that I do not fall into his hands. He is a hard home-made bully who is angry with any difference he sees. How could he tolerate Change? I walk confidently. I have no idea that my happiness that Uro wants to come to the muddy side of life, is a great sign of my power.

Mami smiles and trembles to hear I want to bring the minister's daughter to our bamboo and mud home. I was so happy to do so, but Mami, she is afraid. She tells me we cannot afford high class visitors and that I should concentrate on making dolls and trying to feed them. Uro had to tell her parents where we live. Uro is not coming. Her parents refuse to bring her home. She says she wants to take a public vehicle, and they say an even firmer no. She was reminded that they did not even go to visit parents' village in another part of the country. There, her parents fear she would be bewitched. At home we have no witchcraft as far as I can see. Her parents do not want their tall daughter who speaks a different tongue to visit us. Uro and I both cry. She had not seen grandmothers like Shosho Gige and her parents feared she would faint. What if Shosho Nobody got hold of her in one of her mad feats? Uro is angry. She promises to run away and come during the next holidays. Her sisters tell her they will not be her friends.

Her father could afford school fees in our rich school for five girls, daughters of three wives. Her sisters say they will not visit

villagers with Uro but Uro only smiles. Her father, he has eight sons and they too can go to international schools. He pays.

The following term, I see in the press that ministers have stolen money from the Treasury. The nuns hide the newspaper. Uro is withdrawn. Her other sisters are just laughing. Her father travels alone to their village. He is hiding in his rural home. He is buying traditional brew for all the people there. They are lifting traditional horns full of beer up and laughing. It is a kind of toast, and they bond. They sing. They promise to support one of their own to the bitter end. One man is so drunk, he tells the minister that he has enough cows to become his in-law. He tells him he needs to bring his daughters home for rituals. The minister looked at him, the others said, like a European and with an 'academic angle'. He, the minister just says, hmmmmmm, hmmmmmm, in long, long sounds to everything the people say. He only talks properly when votes are mentioned. He tells them that they should never allow themselves to lose him the son Africa, the son of Africa just because people are fighting his tribe. This excuse is so old. I cry. Ten great years!

Pamoja and Umoja,

when something more interesting than the mobile phone is born, be the first to use it to call. Take all that the world is offering us when you can. Know about it. At first, when the telephone booth came, we thought we would never use it. Now we are also using small phones to know the price of vegetables in the markets before we set off with loads, which Savaiva, we must still carry on our backs to the road. Savaiva, do not give up. Today our messages are flying, tomorrow our sweet-potatoes will fly to distant markets. One day, you too will fly. Do not worry if they only fly from here in the days to come, your grandchildren. Let us worry if there is no freedom to talk. To ask. These come from the freedom to think. To sing. Without these, the shilling loses value.

Take every new development,
which is smaller and smarter.
Do not let anyone bully you about this.
When you buy a new machine,
operate it from the beginning.

In all you can do and must learn,
Take the upper hand!

Those days they feared a phone in the booth, today their teeth
are keyboards. They *bonga*, speak and text market prices.

Pamoja and Umoja,
welcome technological change,
welcome IT.
Welcome all change at that level.
Ask of every electronic gadget 100% of service.
Do not ever stop growth and;
never cower before those who have it all.
If you only have an empty hand!
Still...
raise it and speak!

The ministers' children

If Uro and I and those two Ugandan and Tanzanian ministers' daughters had not reached each others hearts with friendship, how would I have known that Andi wore a lotion called *La Lola* and creamed herself at a tender age with Oil of Ulay?

And when I knew these, I did not ever envy her for having them. I was content with Lux and Rexona already too big for me. Luxury soon turned into shame with Amin Dada's nightmare. The nun's had to disguise Andi and change her father's name on her trunk as she left for home in tears. They ask her for her middle name. She can hardly spell it but she gets it. She is used to the powerful name of her father, but things have changed. The nuns delete her father's famous name in Uganda from her trunk very carefully. No sign of it is left. She is saved by this change. Her family is missing.

She, her sister, cousin and all of us cry; we fear from a distance and when we are together again, we tremble. Many years later, I dream Idi comes to our secondary school through the forest. Maybe he is looking for me to see if I know where my friend's father went.

In my dream, Idi is hiding in an eucalyptus forest near the school store. He marches straight to us. The trees seem to march around him and behind him, with his men. Where is Idi taking the forest, I wonder silently in my dream. The earth shakes with expectation. The volume of his armies marching steps coming for sure to bring sudden change as I have only seen in movies with beats of music that say sit on edge! I am rooted to the ground. I hear them say that if Idi pointed a man out in dreams, that man died and his wife lived. If he pointed you out and you were a woman, the man still died. You became his wife! Wives of presidents should tell us more than they do. Speak truth to presidents when they are so near you. Would these wives fight for their countries and lives? One Mrs Babangida asked for the release of Ken Saro Wiwa. Others have failed us. They are cut. Some of these wives are brave. Dictators have their fraternities. They do not like it when one in their league is exposed. They wear the same clothes, shoes, faces and speak the same language in different tongues. It does not matter what color of skin they have today. They are one big chameleon that walks through dates in history.

Village drama kisses Change

I remember excitement as pure as that rain water we used to have, sweeping the village when my elder brother, Pita the one who should have been 56 now but is still 35 in the grave, told us about a village called Kamirithu. There, he said, so many miles away from Kamirithu; the air was full of expectancy. There, he said, possibility and hope were hiding in words. Something imperceptible and positive happened there. It was art kissing change. Politicians do not like such births.

I remember his joy when he took a *matatu* to look for 'Change' after crossing the river and climbing the hill that separated the valley from the main road and started his journey to Kamirithu. He alighted far away. He walked to Kamirithu Peoples Village Theater. He moved like air.

At the village theater, the villagers acted *Ngahika Ndenda, I will marry when I want*. The powerful title told me many things.

But the maize and beans of Kamirithu,
do not have voices anymore.
There are no other voices there.
The politician has silenced them.
45 Great years of Independence?
They killed many voices that questioned.
Speech fled this land.
When words that prick the conscience flee,
ears are blocked with vanity.
It is very hard to pierce nothingness,
it lives in its emptiness.
It kills.

A nation must have a rational dialogue,
challenges should be met with courage,
humor and good will.
Words can make better Change
than armies with coups.
It is better to hear before,
than to wait to see guns cocking.
1st August 1982:
Wake up, wake up!
Governments are
overthrown to open ears!
An attempted birth,
or suicide should still be recorded.

I miss the voices of Kamirithu and the theater that almost started in Western Kenya. There we would have sang *mwana wa mbiri* with villagers. I miss these places which would have turned into market palaces where the peoples' song and theater would have been heard all around my country. Grassroots politics the grace of the land was stolen.

The sacrament of redemption in expression was repressed. I know I sunk my roots deep but many lost direction. Ngugi was detained before by Kenyatta.

Did the people become *Petals of Blood* and Mwai Kibaki who went to the book's launch turn happy with the fall?

Do suffering and politics poison a writer's prophetic voice?

I hear the voice of Baba again; it is a voice of freedom. "I am building you first!" he would say, "with blocks of education!" "Days will pass, months, years will pass", he would add, "You will see how the past lives in the present when you begin to build with your mind! You will see how the future is in the past!" Those blocks were there in our Literature in school and at University.

Books, many books that made us think hard about our country were taken lightly as other lands etched their writers words on their roads. How long Henrik Ibsen's street is, how powerful his statue. Remember how we acted Doll's House in Nairobi?

At home, those in power saw writers as trouble makers. We defiantly acted *Betrayal in the City* by Imbuga Francis. Do you smile in disbelief Umoja? They made me act Jere. but in my mind, I knew I was Jasper and that they had missed the point!

Now it is us building our country with stories. Education lives in people. We are building it, this country; with our feet, with pens, books, computers and songs, but mainly with resistance. We stand up to some traditions. We refuse to sing circumcision songs for girls to bleed. Even boys need special care in this. How many people will have to die? How many will we have to create again? Baba married a teacher.

She taught us virtue in vowels,
the natural sound of air in us,
carried substance.

Mkubwa,
The great One,
who do you marry?
One wife or Kenya?
Your station is here.
The whistle blows,
get off the train.
Do not select the next driver,
Mmmmmmmmm,

wwwwwwwwww

aaaaawww,

iiiiiiiiiiii!

The people know how, and

then perhaps it will rain!

We want to dream higher.

Some skulls still stare at me. They are red: Oulo, Juguna, Oscar and so many unknown and disappeared. Some politicians are “drinking nectar out of dead skulls”. Here is the full story Ang’. I saw it with my own eyes. I speak to the politician again, De Gado. Mr and Madam Politico, you sat with Juguna’s little brother in many meetings before you were voted in as an MP in Eastlands, Nairobi, Kenya. You played them Mwai’s ruling tune in the morning, and in between the afternoon at 3 p.m., you also gave them Orange T-Shirts of Opposition, you told them, they came with love, from Raila Amollo Odinga. Now that you are in power, you do not sit with those youths. You do not build their dreams. You dream old. You used youth. Is it possible you sit in your sessions without even a point of order when youth are disappeared? If you are so afraid in there, who will give us moral power outside here? We elected you to be our voice. Why did you, a mother and a father, drink, dance and laugh with that boy and you would not raise a finger when he went missing? Why is it so dangerous to fight for him now that you are in Parliament? Why did you let him go alone when these days even dogs are accompanied and walked in Kenya?

Where do you harvest money from?

May your next ballot box be empty,

and your bank be filled with red skulls singing!!

De Gado, Jogu, Ang’,

Savaiva, Nyarloka, Nyaga,

Eboni, Hariri,

Nyanjiru and Nyakairu,

stand together.

Refuse to be used.

De Gado has a dream

Eboni, you say you are neglected when I speak. Let me tell you about beauty which in life must be a lover of humor and joy. It is hard for me to see unhappy beauty. People who know pain know beauty also.

Nothing will allow me to forget Baba shaving and singing; *"When I was young, my father said... son I have something to say.... And what he told me I'll never forget until my dying day...."* But his Baba, my Grandfather never sang in English. My mother told him to stop showing off and chided him for being too contented with his looks.

She would ask, "Who sang that? Your father? Never. He only sang in our Mother Tongue! There is a man called Cliff Richard," She said. None of us spoke when Mami sang of eyes that laugh from a soul that cries. She knew English well. She could sing, *"Row, row, row your boat..gaily down the stream! merrily, merrily, merrily! Life is but a dream!"* without mixing her 'r' and 'l'sounds. She taught us Mother Tongue and Kiswahili proudly. No language stopped her from being human. In the evenings; she often sang, *"Macho yanacheke, moyo unalia"* and after some time, she would switch to; *"Are you going to Scarborough Fair?"* Yes, Simon G came home by song! She would sing to me. She smiled in true artistic flair, before beginning to tell us stories. Perhaps she thought of our Baba who went and left her so often.

Nyakairu and Nyanjiru, I know he thought of the real things that Grandfather would have advised him never to forget- to live for the black peoples' freedom, for country-only that sadly for some it remained land- and family.

We treasured our mornings with Baba. He gave us hope. He had worked at everything to help us move. He, the caddy Grandma En made fun of saying his good figure was not enough for her daughter. Now he lay beneath the ground. In December 1990, Baba denounced

the detentions of Matiba and Rubia; in our family chats. He welcomed demonstrations against this. He renewed his driving licence in April 1991. He died at Nazareth Private Hospital, before he was back on the road for his family, freedom and country.

I have to say the resurrection from anesthesia which a nun who spoke broken Gikuyu in an Italian accent promised me failed! It was not a miracle which was required. Just normal expertise. It was not accessible for Baba. He could not get public hospital treatment.

The cold and flower filled countryside stared back at me with hardness. Baba was gone. The hospital was freezing. No emergency machine moved. That is the only winter I will ever know in life.

How could I tell the nun that my doll made of a maize cob had risen from its death even if I had not found it? Was the real 'resurrection' to remain only in books? Had not Kenyalin returned to us? I wanted to hold Baba again. I wanted to hear him singing. To see him shaving. I wanted to hear him tell us again about the day he left the detention camp. How his body felt when it received freedom to walk. He always loved my debates with him. I wanted today, to hear him respond to my words.

Oh, if you belong to the generation
I can call Baba,
Let me hear you and your words.
Let me hear you sing again for my land,
Let me hear you tell us never to tire of the struggle.
Let me hear you warn the politician!
Let me hear you call out dead leadership to life again!
Our hospitals and schools, our transport systems,
are the best images of you.
If we are forced into private places where we still die,
We ask why we struggle.
Why do we struggle in public
only to die with bills in private hospitals?
Why do our children feel safer,
becoming permanent members
of private clubs,
without public voices?
Why?

Never learn

De Gado, Baba is your ancestor. "They will never learn!" De Gado tells me. "They will never learn! They do not understand what has happened to this nation. Not in their hearts. They see us like films!" They drive huge cars past today. They hide in the green and leafy places and private ocean beaches. They are not proud of our public hospitals. They steal from them and from our public cemeteries. They do not pay their taxes. I know they do not see De Gado. They do not see his friends who died on the streets. They do not see his mother and other mothers who died of Aids. They do not understand greed and how it affects the people. They do not seem to know that once in power, a person must struggle against their own self. Against the inclination to think they are owners of everything.

They see De Gado's sisters on Koinange Street. They offer them a few hours for cursed money. They give them the Aids virus for change. Look, De Gado does not need any more demi-gods. De Gado was suspicious of me when I said, "we Can!" He cannot trust ever the capitalist. But our "we can!" need not be about capitalism. You can have private property in good measure. We must go against the Big Man mentality. See that one holding his country hostage this Christmas. He declares to the sobbing Babas and Mamas, tired of rape and disappearances of loved ones these words, "I am the President."

Your coast,
whether of ivory or gold,
should be in your heart.
How many bags of presidencies,
can you eat in life?
Why will they not booo?
You want more ,
displaced persons before
Sudan takes care of hers,
Before Kenya recognizes her own?
How tired can my continent be?
We must rid ourselves of these megalomaniacs of power, power for self.

Our 'yes' has to be for the IDPs and their new fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters. It has to be for our conquests against all corruption grand and simple. It has to be for our food. It has to be for De Gado. "Yes we can!" De Gado has a dream. He has refused to give up and we are glad. He now sings for all Afrika not to forget its past, for then it will have no future.

Oh!

So glad are we with those in the
continent,
in the nation,
who do not lose their dreams.
This is all that keeps us going.
Dreams.

De Gado is lucky he has a dream.

On the morning he arrived in Nairobi,
bulldozers moved into Kibagare and left Rosa in a comma in a
demolished shack. Kibagare people left for Kayole. Mukuru or the
'rift' in Nairobi begun to swell with new faces. Rosa's voice was not
heard singing anymore and her dreams died with her. Sister Wajiru
who had helped Rosa dream, died soon after. Before this she had
seen Muoroto demolished. It had to do with elections 1992 and 1997.

After every demolition,
there were more people at the
entrance of churches,
and mosques begging.

In 1992, we got back multi-party participation in elections after
many years. President Moi then did not preach unity in diversity.
He told us that Afrikans were cursed for having many tongues.
Matiba's votes got stolen. Do many tongues take away the humanity
of a people? Do many songs kill us?

The Big Man took the tongues,
and threw them into prison cells.
Beads thrown into a volcano.

He was a master checker in politics of pain.
Diversity and contrasts,
that made tourists come from afar,
all over the world to see Kenya.
At home we destroyed Kenya.

Then he graciously turned around and said he was as tall as a giraffe in politics and that he saw far and wide. He graduated himself as a Professor of Politics and we smiled.

He was cursed by naked mothers at Freedom Corner for detaining their sons without trial and keeping them in for many years. He ate that curse. People were thrown out of areas they called home for many years. They became refugees. Some young men began to look for their fathers and ancestors and to return to their traditional religion. There were many people without roots.

Olunguruone in Molo became a huge wound. The soil erosion, through education erosion, became people erosion. It happened again in 1997. Some of the people who were displaced at Likoni at the coast and again in the Rift Valley and Molo. Some of the people who displaced in 1992 tried to strike new roots. They were extirpated again after the election of 1997.

De Gado, two generations before you and generations after were miscarried by Kenya. A few of the children of freedom, like De Gado, are still incubated. Do not be surprised at what followed. They should have known.

The tremors from El Doinyo Lengai begin to gather speed and strength. They hit home in 2007. Each time the rumbles were louder but they came from the past. Looking at the surface, nothing is wrong. The president and his successor, they wear veils and go to church on Sundays. One of them sings with the flock. The bishops' rod blesses them. You cannot throw huge stones at church doors. The people will come for you. But if you want to take Holy Communion at the Basilica do not sit on Kibaki's side of the church. His security is holier. You are deprived of the Lord. Kibaki is in the holy minor house.

Dear Kenya, make De Gado yours. He has educated himself. He reads books about Change. He is not cheated by fake change. He tells Mukuru people to say yes to community organizing. He

and they, pay their taxes! De Gado is not asking you for money that you have earned. He is saying that he and a new team know something else. He is saying it is immoral to wallow in money today in Kenya because the poor are too poor and opportunities gone.

This is the Change Kenya needs. This is the Change. Redistribution of material resources; land, education! That Parliamentarians wear workers clothes and shoes and go to work for an ordinary salary doing the night shift and singing like Baba and Mami! De Gado you are lucky you are still young in spirit! Gogo died of shock. Loud preachers and speakers do not like retreats. They were calling out for the richest to come forward and shame the widow's mite. They took money and left the country burning, promising people to meet them in heaven.

See how they strut
to power,
waving golden notes of money.
See how they dance to power smiling
till coins fall out of their eyes.
See how they have young girls sway,
standing by their side
another form of currency.
Always trying to cheat the earth!
Earth goddess,
Earth goddess,
hear us!

I saw her, Gogo Chelagat, the one who used to sell us tomatoes at Raptarus in Burnt Forest obey orders. She held the hands of her grandson, they chopped his head. She yelled. One, sharp, short and shrill 'uuuuuuuuuu!... and she fell in the ditch.

"If you try to get out of there, you die!" they screamed at her.

I can hear you all mourn and sing. I wish to join you, but I must continue with my story.

Gogo Chelagat has fallen. She sees many walls of soft soil around her. But she is not in a grave. Will the walls collapse and bury her? She hobbles out after silence returns, her eyes, ears and memory are tough. They hide nothing.

She comes out just in time to see fire open up the womb of expectant Agata the daughter of Thagata, who wants to give birth again to her freedom fighter Mother.

Chelagat says:

To name Thagata again like Elekeingati was named.

To give her a rebirth. But she cannot.

Can you all hear her cry? Pamoja, how shall we not mourn hearing her? Gogo Chelagat says,

“I thought I had seen everything that there is to see in this mad world!” She cried to herself, “But Kenya eats her own womb! Kenya is burning!”

She goes on with her dirge!

“Have I eaten death?

Why have I seen death eat my grandson?

And the child in the womb of Agata,

has it eaten death?

Why are my ancestors waiting to call me?

I should have died before,” She screams.

No TV or radio hears her voice. The voices of women are silent, not because they do not say anything. It is that nobody picks their voices up. The loud speakers are all gone with preachers and politicians.

Gogo Chelegat says like Grandma En said when both our Pita and Elekeingati died at different times, that she should have died first. This was her song.

“I should have gone first, I cannot live.

I have seen what human eyes should not see.

I have seen.

I have seen a row of male bodies mutilated in their private parts all lying on a cold floor in a morgue. They did this because they were not circumcised. They want to circumcise a nation by force even in death. They did this to them. How shall it be forgotten? Has his curse affected us all

Us from whom he bought bananas on the road side,
and the women smiled saying,
The King has visited my humble roadside corner
of ripe bananas?

Has the curse affected all those who
he met on the road and offered chewing gum,
saying school children should chew in class?

Has his curse affected those he gave money to fuel their cars,
and those he gave cars and plots?

Has not his curse, eaten us all,
because we stood by and sang with others,
ewe mtukufu, you glorious one,
as if we did not know he is no god?

As if we did not know that many golden calves are men in power?

I tell you. It is hard to accept, but a curse does not go for leaves only. It seeks the roots. It goes back to the waters and the waters were bitter. We must call upon the same Mothers of Freedom, to come back to Freedom Corner and bless our freedom. We have become blind. We have kissed a curse against Change.”

Kenyalin, I cry for Change now. I tell you, I have seen not in pictures but with my eyes, I have seen. Blood flows all over and a brave camera man tries to walk among them like an ancestor examining his living body. I see him with his big eye on his shoulder from where I stand. It is dead silent and he is weeping as he films those bodies. It is silent. They are lying on their backs all of them and all of them are men who have been mutilated in their sacred parts that belong to them and their their ancestors! I am haunted. How do they pass to the other world without their entire identity and leave none here? How without own issue of children? How did we come to this? When did our traditions fall this far? Do we have any? Why did we not escape this like the ostriches and giraffes or run together like all animals the Mara crossing; dying but from efforts to save each other?

I ask and ask Kenyalin and all of us; Jogu, Gige, Umoja, Eboni, Ong’ and Achieng’. Tell everyone that I ask. Why did we tolerate killings that expressed anger with personal freedom? Why did we lie back as if we could not do anything against them that killed? Do you remember

killings in which someone always carves out private parts and tongues? Tongues, tongues, tongues. Private parts even in times of peace. The violence now is intense in 2007 and 2008. But this is not new. It has been under the surface. What is it? Is this how we got used to death and evil? It is hard to look hard. It is even more horrifying to have internal sight here! What do you do if you have both? Your own vision can explode your mind!

Do remember the tremors from Ol doinyo Lengai,
ceaseless they shook us the other day?
Lengai spoke with Donyo Sabuk,
in Gatuanyaga.
Lengai wanted to speak too to Kenya.

How does one make friends with fire? It comes, consumes and goes. Today, it is consuming: blood, flesh, wood, green grass and I call for the cleansing spirit as fire attempts the impossible. It wants to consume Lake Sango, the one they call Victoria, Lake Naivasha is all blood and Nakuru awaits its turn. How do I make friends with fire? I try to run, I fall. Mami falls, my Grandmothers had to fall before. Mami, my beloved and our Mother the country both fall. Is Grandma En going to burn in her grave? I remember her favorite dresses and her wooden Swahili sandals. I remember her tough spirit and I cry.

I make the call to drive these spirits away, let us all beat our pots and pans and all that can make a noise unto our pain and drive evil over the lakes. Fire attempts the impossible still. It wants to consume us. We must quench it with tongues and hearts!

I search for beads of many colors and songs!

He put a song in my breast!

A ng' and Savaiva, do you know what song that resists can do for us? It can re-make us. It can do more things. I am searching. I know we need more than song. Just let us start somewhere. Maybe like the 33 miners of Chile we need to go deep and then hold on to a continent's life.

Standing on the brow of a hill De Gado pointed at where the famous old village singer lived.

"Down, down there!" De Gado told me as if his own voice was flowing down the path. "Dooown, dowwwwn, *ooooooo haul!*" he spoke as if his voice would peep like eyes and lengthening itself meander down the long walk.

I looked down the steep path. Cold stones soaked in a tapering rain stared back at me. Small drops of rain hit my forehead and nose. Red soft soil moved in little rivulets and tried to hug the grayish stones but running water pushed it down the slope. I had to walk down.

I slid on my flat rubber shoes, which I kept in the boot of my little wheelbarrow-make car. While leaning on it, I shut the doors well and stuck out my right foot like a feeler. I felt the hard stones through the soles of my shoes pushing my toes. I saw dashes of red mud and water mark my skirt. It looked like a deliberate pattern near the hem.

I held up my umbrella skirt. It was time to turn things upside down and inside out. The boy ahead of me pulled up his brown trousers so that he looked as if he was being hanged with unseen ropes his little behind flattened against his brown dirty trouser bottom.

The fresh smell of rain pierced through my nose. I took a deep breath. This was no path, it was a really a ditch between two green plant fences. Many *Mukinduri* leaves had fallen fresh but others were

rotting. The smell of rain hitting soil after a long time, was different from the one that hit rotting leaves. Both smells merged into one strong one. It was the smell of the earth in interaction with rain water.

Now that a little sun was shining, I could see the water turn into vapor and rise again. I saw a tiny black snail wiggle into the soil between the knee high plants, which I had to grab from time to time to prevent myself from skidding and falling.

I could not turn back. My heart beat fast. I felt joy hover around my lips as if caressing me. I had to hear this man sing to me. His song in my heart had become bigger than it was in its themes. The question for me was why he sang on and never stopped. Yes, he sang of wonderful beauties of his land. But somewhere in my soul, the songs touched my strength to love my nation. He sang words but I heard more than words. I got more messages about myself, standing and making things happen. He sang me to fare on knowing that one must beat a new path with those who see, blow by blow, verse by verse. "Oh my traveler there is no path, the path is made by walking." But a path could only be made by many walking over the same land repeatedly. I wore Afrika in the soles of my feet, the whole world did, but perhaps it did not know. We had to find her still. And yes, this was the secret of the village singer. I was looking for the song of the village. The fresh rain fragrance hit me more strongly. Sometimes my flat shoes would just skid on the surface of a place where there were no stones. It was really my own feet that held me down. De Gado seemed to round off edges and sail on smoothly, only looking to see if I had fallen down but telling me all the time, especially when I had to stick my hips out to retain balance, that I would not fall.

No doubt the rain invigorated me right into my lungs. Its smell, I thought, fought to assert itself; as if to remind the world that in the beginning the world was all clean and healthy. The rain was delicious and yet inedible. I was hungry. Rain made me feel hungry when it fell like this; a sudden, mid-morning shower.

"Here is the house!" De Gado said excited. I looked at a wall that slanted into the house as if the entire abode was planning to collapse just like Shosho Gige's. Is this the house? Was it like Baba's also not to be pointed at? The dignity of the house stood before my eyes.

The weight of the door frame had made the mud fall back in. De Gado and I were not shocked. I stooped like De Gado and said, ‘*Hodi!*’ as I entered. Many voices answered, “*kearefooooo!*”

“Are you all good?” I interjected.

“The hand is here....” His wife mumbled to the man. I felt something strange about holding out my hand to someone who could not see it but I drove my palm into his. He held it tight and smiled. “I touched him!” I thought. He smiled more broadly.

“Are you all good?” I asked again.

Some answered yes. Others confirmed the voice in lower tones which I could hear clearly. “She is the one, the one who asked our leaders to listen!” One little boy called Berichi said. His face was filled with fascination. His little eyes nearly popped out. He is the boy who enjoyed life no matter what. He is the one who would prompt the singer to get on with a new song. For now, Berichi just had his mouth open, ready to sing with the old musician.

The Singer started, “What? Is not this the voice we have just been listening to on the radio? How have you come in this rain while speaking on radio? I am honored!” I explained that the program was repeated. He felt for his accordion. The little boy’s lips begun to move as if his lips were the accordion. It was as if they had been put on pause mode on a screen. The accordion and the lips. They started and slowly became louder as if his heartbeat was adding the volume. He sang with all his heart saying that if Parliament did not care for its children it would fail. It was time for a new crop of leaders. He turned circumcision songs into songs for women’s power. I was lost in his words before I heard a voice.

“Oh you were celebrated, you were celebrated,
because you came out without fear, heh,
heh, heh, heh, heh, heh, heh.”

“Grandfather, this is the one who wanted Kenya to become one and Afrika to unite. But her votes and voters went with the wind.”

“I have a riddle,” Said Grandfather.

“When you see her, see more than her,” He said.

“What is that?” Asked the little boy.

Said Grandfather, “ See Change. She loves Kenya deeply. That is where Change begins. In love, not hate. She would marry the country any time. I think Kenya should marry Change.”

“Grandfather, when one loves a country, is it the plants, the leaves, the people or the animals and the soil that one loves?” Berichi asked.

“One loves all of those and more... but the greater love is to realise that these are only ours for some time and that your children must find them still here,” Grandfather said. He was impatient to start singing like a Kenyan eagerly takes the first cuts of *nyama choma* and *Kachumbari* or fish with the fingers and pinching ugali with a firm comma like movement, takes it to the mouth. He said that is how Kenya had to be impatient for Change.

“Grandpa, you have that song about the lady you met; ‘*sangiki wa girigacha...msichana, redi wa taiti!*’ Sing it Grandpa, we do not want to lose all our joy, even if the country bleeds, Grandpa. Grandpa sing to her real songs. Sing to Change. Sing to create and not just for consolation!”

Everyone laughed.

“You, Berichi!” said the singer laughing. He quickly explained that this boy was unique and that they believed he represented many, many people who could not speak for themselves. For a fleeting instant, I remembered our Ghatt.

Many thoughts flashed through my mind. It was dark in here but I could see family sepia framed pictures on the wall. They could have been any of our families at that time. There were newspaper cuttings too. An image of Christ the Good Shepherd with a lamb across his shoulders was a centre piece. I had seen this image in many other homes in different parts of Kenya. I stared at it a while and the little boy saw the magic happen. The Shepherd became black. The Shepherd became his Grandpa and he jumped onto his shoulders happily. He suddenly said that we had to be the ones who shepherd and not wait as if for a train to come and take us out of our pains. The profundity of this, struck me deeply.

A sense of water everywhere, mud, water uniting us and making us sit together to hear stories especially in the rain and drink songs pervaded my soul as the warmth of the fire reached me. I was holding a good cup of tea in my hands. It was water that kept us together as country I thought. The water of Mau Forest, Aberdares, Lake Sango and the waters of Naivasha and Nakuru; Turkana and Baringo and Chala. And the waters of our rivers and the rivulets of our waters of the rain in our ridges like the one I had just walked down through were our hope and unity. Pamoja and Umoja, I see you smile happily.

But the smoke from the fire hit me and my eyes watered profusely. A little girl stoked the fire and a bunch of yellow sparks fled out and died in the air like many shooting stars.

“I must celebrate you with songs, you are Change here... you bring rest. You have come here. Everywhere you go, the people listen to you as if you are speaking in Parliament. You will go further. I will send you to all Kenya and you will bring it together. In the Singer you see, poor and blind, there is a prophet. Yes, Kenya will marry you. Yes, Kenya will marry change in her children like you. I have already seen this happen in my soul, so I say it without fear! I feel it coming. I bless you. Your enemies will be many but they will be scattered in seven directions and forked out. You love your country, love it more. I will compose you a song and put it in your chest. Every time you speak or write, the song will leap out of you. And there will be delight. People will love your song and your song will be everywhere. It will be a song that pulls other songs from all over our land. Exiles and those in the diaspora will return. A Kenyan will not fear a Kenyan abroad and at home. It will be a song that is like the main river. It will have many tributaries like different languages but loudly will it be heard and many leaders will it bring home! Don’t pay me for this song!” I stared at him in awe. I knew every word he said was true.

I felt a flood of tears come to my sore eyes and the skin of my body gathered into little bumps. I forgot my wet skirt and feet. It was as if my body was in a world of clouds. My tears fell freely. This man whose knowledge of the furthest place in his songs seemed to be the forests in Kijabe area, places somewhere close to Nakuru, made me look beyond and see the Hurri Hills way out beyond Marsabit. This man so apparently enclosed by darkness gave me sight, hearing, touch, taste and even the smell of my country when the rain water penetrates the rich soil. It is a wonderful smell. It enriches us all. He went further. He showed me a continent. He fumbled around again for his famous accordion as his happy wife Riri smiled. Berichi run back in fast and his lips turned into an accordion waiting to be heard. Suddenly the room was silent and only filled with music notes dancing in the air by themselves. Off he went... The singer and his song. As he sang, I noticed he had changed his song. He sang and we all heard.

“Oh, if you want a new nation,
Oh if only you want a new nation,
your passion has to be the way
that you love the lady in beads of many colors.
The lady in the red dress.
The one you used to write letters to,
‘Dear Sugarcane,
Honey. Sweetness, Dear Love,
and hide them. The one you sang to...
‘Oh I met a ladi! Oh, I met a ladi...
upon the hill,
dressed in a red
and green, white and black taiti! Then love her. Want her if you
really love Change and revolution!”

From that day music and floated everywhere in my mind. Wherever I went I heard the song that was planted deeply in me. It burned in me like a CD. I downloaded it in my soul. I heard it in many languages. In Turkana, in Luo, in Taita, Italian, Dutch, Spanish, German, English, Gikuyu... I heard the same song of love for my country that he put in my breast.

I hear this song swirl around the hills at Hurri, Limuru and at Cherangany and Chyulu at the same time. I hear it sang by the village singer in Kigirima. Even the parched throat singer of Kamasasia in Turkana drinks it. I hear her and she says she will not stop singing even as she sits and stares at endless sand at the end of the road, where Sudan begins. This singer sang longer than any other. Her voice was carried by the mirage in the sand to Sudan, Ethiopia and Somalia. I hear an echo but I am not sure. I think I can hold the notes that sing our song long enough. I must find a way; it is in our feet. Afrika is, in our mouths, hearts and heads. We are alive for this. We must find a way.

One boy stoked the fire with a stick and a host of sparks shot out of it and died suddenly in the air; like dying shooting stars. I followed the ashes that seemed dying and dark. I found some fire in their embers. I kissed the embers into a glow and in my eyes they lit up my face. They lit me up orange with the light of the embers making a map of Kenya. I turned around dancing as the singer sang

on; that tip of Kenya that sticks out there reached out for De Gado and a girl in the diaspora named Mother of Berichi jumped back from the diaspora. She was young as if she had never left home. She is sweet. I slid the map and the music slowly into her heart and she begun to pass it on. Love for country begun to grow like many different big trees of peace. All my sisters and brothers and the ones in the diaspora are alive now with this love!

I was told that to keep on passing this love on with new life, I had to forget my face. I had to be ready. I was told to give birth with pain again, and this time to a whole nation. I would need many people to help me do that. But it was no pain, I realized, if I remembered that I too was given birth to. I was given birth by parents who told stories and struggled every moment. These were the many parents of Kenya. We could all work in the hearth for Change. But before them and us, had come our grandparents. Each of them had come in their own way and left us a different legacy. What do we leave De Gado? It became clear that we had to beg for sight from the blind man. Finally, we got the secret deep down as the miners were also found in the depths. This is the secret. It is that we all have to work for this Change in a very personal way. Kenya, will you marry me? It cannot be like a Change existing outside of us. It had to be a Change in us, in our blood and breath. It had to be. It was not enough to sing *Harambee*. Let us build together. It was vital to take nation building as seriously as those who fought in Mau Mau took their commitment. Umoja, you look surprised. It is true. Loving our country has to be something alive. Something we do with the personal commitment that would make one take an oath. A wedding oath, an oath to struggle. It is a must. Suddenly, they saw with the sight of the blind singer that women birth freedom. They saw this and they trembled.

Skating over life and history

Pamoja asks what if they do not remember that women ever did anything to redeem our nation. She knows that women did many things. She is furious at the thought that often they are forgotten. She takes over suddenly and speaks addressing herself to Kenyalin and Umoja directly.

She begins. Memories are monuments erected in our cells. If we want it, our memories can be centered; to grow in love for *patria* and '*matria*'. If we chose to, a national flagpole can check our weight, balancing us, feeding those who need more, the way Baba and Mami fed us and balanced things for all of us their children. Mami, my lion did not shout she was a lion, she mothered.

Baba did a wonderful job. If we want to dance all over the republica, North and South, East and West, holding different colors of the ribbon, green, white, red and black, singing and dancing with hope; becoming a nation spirited, we can! Refusing to place borders of language even when many languages we speak is possible! Seeing that all beads are as rounded as huts we can say, peace and *asalaam alei kum*. Not judging the tongue but only performance is possible. Rejoicing in diversity is fine. Singing our many songs and drumming freedom into mountains and lakes; we can! Refusing the songs of ritual that steal life and kills music we can go ahead. We can grow together with everyone, for no one is better than the other.

When I gather the four winds,
 strength grows in me.
 I hear myself saying
 to all of you who listen:

I will protect those whom they threw to the hyenas and vultures. Hush! these animals in their nature refused the kill. Allow me my sacraments of change. This time, it is the woman who lifts the cup. They did it before and you silenced them. You would not marry them! But their wedding has been arranged and you cannot fail to come to see the joyful Kenya that marries with great desire those who Change! These are a few wedding invitation cards. My parents and grandparents, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunts and my children are making the cars we need to ferry people to the wedding. Each car is a bead worn by all peoples of Kenya and beyond. They are working with beads of many colors. All the new dolls are helping and the old ones you know who have listened to this story have really gone far.

Mekatilili; I know you come first with your bare soles, our Afrika mapped on it. You walk from Giriama land fearlessly to Kisii. My Gandhi of many miles and smiles even at war, who says they do not know woman at work for a nation?

Mary Nyanjiru; you told them before Grandma En did- you were her role model- that what woman wears matters in every struggle.

Fashionistas know that it matters for trade. You know what women wears matters for life. That woman must claim her voice even unto the bloody bullet. How did that priest say we have not had any women martyrs yet and we let him say it? I know you are the ancestor of De Gado's mother, the other Nyanjiru.

Nyakairu you have never heard of Moraa Ong'iti? She is Kenya. Mothers of our nation, hear our prayers and drive out all mad politicians. They herd us into the kraal of tribe when they want to slaughter the calves, the cows and the bulls at once. We saw them lying down in the morgues, our children, men without private parts! The women, had been raped already so many times, some in front of their own children. Mothers of the nation, tell them these are all our children. Let us refuse to sleep in tribe again! They will hear I know.

Kimaathi: hide him, still he speaks. I bring him first and you know, not for Central tribes but for all the poor who fought like Baba and Mami whose graves are unrecognized. I see one Jaramogi in him; the people Kenya would sooner forget.

Pio Gama Pinto, you still did your sign of the cross from your head to your heart and toes. You were determined in name. You heard Jaramogi and you knew Kenya needed equity. You did not hide your heart even when your mouth was silent. You held your beads. Maybe you lie with them un-spoilt around your chest in the grave. Like that from the beginning and now. But it shall not always be, we refuse that they shoot and kill the bodies of the innocent. The spirit who can kill? None, and these ask questions and we hear them and repeat.

Mboya: the pavement on Moi Avenue is still bloody. They shall not forget your challenge of nationhood. They shall not forget what they did to your clean Suba forehead that had gone so far beyond a tribe and become a world. I am ashamed of them! I sing you. Baba could see your forehead in the dark.

JM Kariuki; I miss you and cry you, Baba! You cried in Parliament for orphans and widows, but no one does that today. Shikuku told you we had to find Mboya's killers. Did you know it is always a list and never one? Let us have women with hearts and the courage to rise from the ashes of the Rift Valley still sharing food with the national diaspora. Woman has no tribe Baba, you know it. Did you know Kariuki's name means he will return, rise again? And when he does, he will ask for justice not tribe. He will ask for the tribeless poor! Did you know of Sankara and Lumumba Patrice before?

Robert Ouko; your sharp wit dims them to darkness and evil now stalks them everywhere. You know their lives are stuck in the State House keyhole. The birds saw and heard everything, and told on them. There is no escape. It is evil for anyone to steal any person's days under the sun. All of us should have all our days for after, who knows, who knows? Truth, Justice and reconciliation will your widow one day open her doors to, and Kenya be set free. How we lined up to find you being carried in a hearse bound for the west, what tears you left in Central before we were corrupted so? Nairobi came to a standstill, Eastern, North Eastern and Coast were hushed and all of us stung with pain like bees that had left a plain and descended in a hole.

All their widows were here with us just till the other day. Mukami, has stayed for Kimaathi. Pamela (has recently left us with her beads on her head, heart, chest and soul), and the only person who was

happy on that day for those who have faith, was Tom, gone before. Do two souls meet and share a story, laughter and pain? Terry and we have been silently trying. We stood up for a Kenya married to Change for all. Women have borne their pains eternal.

All heroes, today is Mashujaa Day. The day of heroes and their times. You had the power inside of you like Baba, to knit us into a nation. I know your widows still cry and your daughters and sons speak. I know the disappeared mainly of Kenya are fighting out of the confusion of the pain and dark mist. They mean it Baba. They have changed the rituals of burial out of pain. I know we are one province under woman; and her power can feed us all.

Did you hear? All the artists in Kenya and beyond are coming to the wedding. Our sons, your grandchildren, I plead they hear my song. I speak to them of what we must do. Together we will build our nation. You must help build your house and the houses of other peoples so that we have one nation. If they make Parliament the House of Thieves, demolish it with your vote! We refuse to burn the houses of our neighbors! You are cheated to do that! No one gains. We only have one house to build and one boundary. Our nation which holds our graves which we must live beyond; is what we must build. We must not lose our memory! It is hidden in the ground with our ancestors!

Our politicians do not take us to those places where a nation is forged with work and imagination. We must fly there alone. It is whispered in Kiabuu that the Mau Mau graves are desecrated with commercial buildings. For long they said no business flourished there; no matter how *Nova* they made it sound! They have built on graves for people not so desperate for shelter. Grandma En had to be sent away, but they desecrate. I have heard it sang that where the National Museum stands- near there- unknown graves lie; and the government has let in floods of donor money to rejuvenate the buildings before excavating and making it public in honor of bodies buried there. We do not need a moment of silence, we need to gather in singing reverence and ask if this is true. Over there- art- at the gate, not in heaven, art announced we take pride in our association with homo erectus. But we forget our recent ancestors who lie there, the many who lie there! We have erred. We are in the garden of paradise, standing on graves. How is this rational?

You cannot hide all graves especially the ones in our hearts. JM Kariuki's hidden body was not eaten by hyenas, he defied you through a Maasai herdsman he spoke and said, 'I am'. I think Kimaathi deliberated not to easily be found. Oh, he laughs at us if when we go to meet "General Mathenge" at the airport! I am glad Baba whose British Overseas Certificate of Competence has many signatures had left the airport then. It is not possible to slam with rage, the door of an aeroplane as it flies.

And well, Kimaathi and Mathenge are determined to hide their remains for they know we lack reverence. That we forget many a hero who are known by name. That many of them are still in their poor mud huts. Who should be speaking for them?

Hooting

We politicians arrive hooting at villagers from our big cars saying we have come to lay the dead Oneko to rest; soon Kaggia we treat the same, as we bury the living in dirty dust. The rest of us have flown over. Let us search our motives. The truth is that it would be too bad for politicians not to be on TV during such a burial. We are haunted souls. We are haunted by our divisions. We forgot that all mothers mourn the same death when a nation destroys her children. We are tormented; some open their eyes in wonder at the Windsor as the wind blows in Nairobi, where the Japanese play golf all year round, bringing us island gold. But we know how to win our gold, silver and bronze in Olympic Games. More local children will get gold home if you let them.

Nyakairu wonders why this land we play golf on today, beating Tiger, cries. It is desecrated. It is where bodies of fighters were thrown. Here we take revenue but do not pay taxes in Parliament. Children of freedom fighters continue to die in pain, homeguards own everything. De Gado knows this only too well.

I did not know that I should have to go to Manyani to save my memories of Baba from a bloody past. I do return. I return to Manyani, Limuru (Ngenia), Kisumu, Lari, Mwea (Kiugu gia Gathigiriri). I go to Lamu; the Rift Valley, Wagalla land, Ngong Hills and the Nyayo Torture Chambers skirting the museum of Nairobi

again. I purposely revisit these nerve centers of memory. I have heard patriotic music about Kenyatta coming out of Lodwar. But no one builds the sorrowful singing corridor from Nyati to Nyayo House to Lodwar, stringing these places together out of pain. Public holidays are about other heroes but not the one at home in the hut. Our Mashujaa we lift up on 20th of October, the month which harvests happily. These are the ones whose suffering, crying voices we scattered to the wind. May they be well, and live long.

Those who knew Mau Mau Reserve Villages say they were very like the IDP camps we have seen at Naivasha, Eldoret and Nakuru after December 2007- April 2008 post -poll violence. I pray that no one makes a proverb about the pride of becoming an IDP. Prisoners are badly treated; Kenyatta left the land sick.

We must be winners at all levels. We do call on your strength and grace, you who would train for marathons in Iten and win all over the world. We first came there to debate. Ideas swirled in the mist and Brother saw our victory.

Marathon now, you win in London, New York and Moscow. You win in Beijing. Do not lose at home. Marathon and free speech. You are the ones we can hold up when all we see is displeasing. Girls are not trophies. You are winners who have wrapped themselves with the national flag. At the moment of irrationality when the nation burned, did you hold out your *mursik*, strong traditional milk for all to drink? Reflect with us. Reflect.

Paddy they say, was a man who loved green, the green of the world not just of Ireland, deflect the snakes with him.

Fear fills me as I pass near the field of the Lari massacres near Limuru. No one softens the pain in the plains and the Wagalla beckon me. They reject a sham justice and reconciliation process. I passed near the land of the massacre unexpectedly; and I choked telling the stories of a very dark past. We opened our eyes to search for light. We saw its first drop, not ray, in the horizon. Child, do not ask me why I remember pain, ask me what you will, but not to forget. We live better in our memories and with them. Somehow, our past is never gone.

I pray, wondering what happened to our national joy in the song *Taxi Draiva*. How can you survive a puncture in another area without a language and with the wrong Passbook in your hands; written KEM today? We do not know the songs of Wakike wa Musungu,

Juju Balomana, George Mukabi and Mary Sengula. We forgot *Ouma* the song sung by Nyongesa wa Muganda. If Mami could not travel through provinces in those days, who stopped songs from traveling through FM's in some languages? Central says the Rift Valley is far, but they are coming; coming slowly slowly.... Even today, *wabiro mos, mos*. And the young man wooing a woman in Nyanza had not seen the Rift Valley. Just like Mami a long time ago. That was before her granddaughter was married and buried in Eldoret.

I wish to remind you, Pamoja, that I had so far, only looked into the Third Class of a train not traveled in it. But years later, I traveled in it covered with a bright red Maasai shuka thrown over me by an old man. That was the day after we waited so long at the Eldoret Railway Station when Sister dropped us 9 hours before time because bringing us down by night would be dangerous, she said. I did not feel safe looking at that title. We were in an average secondary school. Sister said we were big girls. She told us to behave ourselves. There was no chocolate for us. Instead there were strong looking young men reading books and finishing them. I saw one cover- *A tail in the Mouth*. I remembered karate was an art for self- defence.

Voices of little girls haunt me,
they are crying for help at home,
where some parents have shamed
all ancestral taboos.

They are crying on the way to school,
and more loudly in school when the teacher,
uses canes and sticks,
and also his own weapon of war,
His private part,
taking advantage of,
a teaching position to shame,
the learner and the nation,
in a missionary school.

Girls crying,
on their way from home,
waylaid and done in,

losing their tongues,
no voice anymore.
And their organs of rebirth
are scattered along a path,
the ancestors are throwing up!

More journeys

I did not fear traveling by train. Alone later in a common taxi car, the individual's domain, I would have a stranger try to steal my legs. The car was named after Rift. Pita would have killed him. When the time came for me to change schools for my 'A' levels, I did not choose a school, I chose to melt the provinces into one and know my country. I wanted to go to the eastern region or to touch the coast and see our Kenya.

I wanted to play hockey in different places, and shoot goals from everywhere. I always played LW, left wing, for my school. I shot a goal for LCM in Kimilili Girls. Everyone on the bus including Kibet the driver sang all the way in total jubilation! "*leo ni leo tumeshinda, leo ni leo tumeshinda, leo ni leo tumeshinda!*" *Uolololi, uolololi, Uoloo lo! Uuloli Uololi Uloololi! Uolololi, Ulouloli Unolooloolloolll.* Now is now, we have won.

We were extremely happy with our goalie as we called her. No one could score through her pads, not even the boys at Hill School. In St. Patrick's Iten, we left our deep debates. Black Beckie Ogola nyar Kapsabet, how is it that we were never to know your middle name.. Achieng nyar Alego? Nyar Kisum Or who? Jo Kisum can you answer me?

See how her father brightened Kapsabet and never asked for rewards! Hard work and a smiling man, happiness. Life. Who let the AFC farmers down so much? Maybe Jakogello has an answer?

Even before we would learn of Obama
and his ancestors,
Black Beckie Ogola,
Had kept our goal post.

Black Beckie Ogola,
I will call you Achieng' for the sun,
you defended a playing nation for us,
our goalie!

May you suns rise with the earnestness of rural rays,
May your daughters from Kisumu Rural to urban also take the
seat:

drive and fish, drive and fish, drive and fish,
Omena has her place among ngege, kamongo and ngwaci!

Hariri and Eboni, joy and jubilation was ours...and no one asked
in what language joy and jubilation spoke when we were small, just
as no one could define the silent moments when we spoke of my
brother Elekeingati. At that time Eboni's elder brother was born.
He went to a poor school. He and his parents traveled to Nairobi
once. They never went back home after another brother was born.
These children never knew their ancestral home. Their parents were
too poor to ever get onto a bus bound for home. We have let so
many hard working people fall!

UniKenya Varsities
See now our universities are not water towers of unity.
How should a faculty become tribal?
How marks given for drama
with the male teacher?
This is rape.
Girl, this is not to pass.
Mwalimu,
You share dignity with Nyerere.
Be doctor of dignity.
Your competition is with the uncertified.
Villagers who hold the key to true humanity.

We have severed the cord,
we have broken the rope,
our people lose themselves,
and we watch without books!

No one is recording the way home,
what shall we do when the last one is lost?

The Nairobi University canteen
Seemed to set a good example.
Good healthy food we can afford.
Mutungis efforts with the alumnae
did not go unrewarded.
Nairobi University,
your library is my Maasai Mara,
teeming with knowledge unseen.
Alma mater what can I not do for you?
But why do they come and go,
come and go without taking us higher?

Alma mater,
may you in vigilance
honor Gandhi Wing.

I know the tree of shade has gone.
I have its trunk hidden in the snow.
Grow again, I beg,
Meru Oak.
Grow again.
All Kenyans would like to eat,
under your kind shadow.

The fountain with the giraffe,
shoot tall and see high in leadership.
Young girls of happy longings
organized as women,
keep moving,
stem the tide to K -street.

Young men,
organizing lectures,
with the Father of
Linguistics in Kenya.

Move me again as I hear his story.
Fighting to unite people and people in need,
When Naivasha was on fire and all Kenya burned.
Okoth held hands with language and language and us.
He made a circle with us with Nilotic, Sanskrit,
Kibantu and even Quechua.
We talked in the slums,
We talked in halls,
without asking the other,
how much their language was worth.

May your kind look,
and
smile always open paths,
Okoth son of Okombo,
You refuse to be of ash,
Oburu.
You would not take tribe for a border.
You have refused fear to be your guide.
I am not able to bury your name.
Let those who want to
say it is a shame.

Over there in western,
Masinde Muliro lead the way.
Take a new aim and redeem Kenya.
Remind Moi that he owes us.
Songs in me could be everlasting.

Njoro, you have seen Molo.
Look again and see Kenya.
Remind Kikuyu campus she must not pollute,
the river below where people live.
Kenyatta University; change.
Kenyatta Hospital's pain.
Kenyatta Avenue
open more lead paths, please.
Whether in agriculture of drama,

festivals that wake up ancestors.
Hold on and keep working there.
Be brave to recall Kimaathi's betrayal.

The baobab's wide girth fascinates with a head full of rough afro hair, growing in big tufts. They say these are its roots upside down. If no one cuts it, it will be there for many centuries. It is the home of health this baobab, both mental and physical. Go and embrace its girth and it will tell you softly that no single person can hold the truth alone. Go and embrace places when you think you can tell others how to do what they do. Embrace places of learning with humility. If you fail, a whole continent fails.

I see the bamboo as the bus rolls by. Pita has taken me up to the bus stop and seen me off. I represent my school to Tsavo National Park and see all that grassland and vast land. In the park paths I remember the imaginary snake that always filled the path in my village nightmares. Jogu, we saw an elephant for the first time. Our tales are long when we go back home. I write the report for the school. Chumo goes on with his lectures; "The Baobab (*Adansonia Digitata*) is a striking deciduous tree of immense girth and can go up to 25m in height. Common at the coast and in dry areas up to 1,250 m above sea level, it has no leaves for nine months of the year."

But the main thing is that this tree is a factory with its leaves being used for making ropes and are woven into other useful things. If you reach the mushy part of its fruit, it is laden with vitamin C, not the preserve of the citrus fruits. Its roots are medicine for the hundreds of years the tree lives. It is the hive of many bees in Ukambani. This baobab is the hidden artist in our lives. It has something for everyone. It claims no school or scholarship.

Take your juice and bark all over Kenya.
Heal us with your mighty strength,
hair in mighty tufts.
Vitamins hidden in unusual sources,
health for all and immunity.
Take natural sweetness throughout my land,
you bees of Ukambani.
Take it first to the starving at Makueni.
Take your natural gifts and let us add the irrigation of peace.

I did not forget our schools. I know you are all wondering when I was there, Hariri, in those schools that you know. It was before you. We played against them all and mainly won. You thought I forgot St. Brigid Kitale and later Kyeni in Runyenjes, the place of the funny name? Kangaru was a fountain of learning too. I tell you Nyaga, uniting Kenyans who are as agile, simple and pure as Berichi is not really hard. Asumbi and Misikhu, did you lose your radar? Matunda, has Bet's daughter found a better refuge since Hama left the area? So many good people have been school mates especially before you insisted that people had to go to school in their backyard. Just call schools back to their pride. Ask the Loretos to lead the way. Umumba knows this story. He cannot forget it as he works against corruption. So, Lenana, Nairobi Girls, St. Anna's, all those schools in Nyeri, Jamuhuri and State House, did history eat your voices?

Friends Kamusinga and Kemeloi, Lugulu and Kimilili Girls, The school in Litein and the ones Soi.

I know the silent bird
that worked out peace,
with Onald's hands like Truth's.
Who would have guessed the quiet quake,
without worrying how much is at stake.

I remember Mosoriot Teachers College. Did you think I could ever forget Turbo even after hearing about Turbi? Why are not the schools in Marsabit our best?

Kimathi Institute, is you name just for fun? Chief Mugoiri died but Paulina knows what he meant and how he should be changed. Njiiris will listen. Matuga and Maasai school, what happened to our pride of place? Are schools just about marks? Some are taking children abroad to school, but all of us like to come home. Uro is still coming to our mud house. Starehe you stand challenged, both boys and girls. If Kenya should fail, how will her diversity with European names become universal in a country so divided? Mbagathi is not far away from Athi. Why are you so surprised. Ancestors are speaking in the continent. Nyerere has climbed Kilimanjaro with Makadara in hand. Where are our other efforts? Kenya High, are

you high on the peak? Have you not shaken hands with Olympic? My hope lives in Kibera, yet I perch on Hospital Hill. Sunshine might make the Alliances that we need across the nation. Literature goes across borders but not everyone gets the message. We lost our own tongues round a fire, we forgot that we must understand IT with caution. All human beings prefer the human touch to a technical move. Do not let IT fully steal your voice. Stick it in there. Everytime you will hear a new region of Kenya soars high in national results. Some, you had not even heard of.

Nyarloka, I will never forget you, Min Gem. Silently holding the light you stay even after light is disappearing. Still you hold a burning brand to me and say it. "My first priority would be to nationalize the schools if we hope for an integrated society, Egerton has had spectacular courses...."

You worry Nyarloka, about private degrees and private courses, less at the feet of Gamaliel and more with fingertips on IT.

Hariri, When I was in High School, I went to the coast for the first time. I crossed three regions to get there. It was great to love my country with a new heart filled with love for my school friends. When I looked at the sea, one morning saw the horizon where the sea seems to meet the sky; something profound happened to me. I realised how big the earth was compared to our country. I realised how lucky and beautiful my country was. I could only dream of peace and bounty. Maybe my borders were broken once and for all. I am sure we can all unite if we want to. None of us is here greater than the other. I wanted my country to always be admired, not found faulty.

Everybody is pointing at my nation

A chieng, Ong', and Kenyalin, it is not only my children who are embarrassed when they speak about our country abroad and everywhere. Even if you want to say you are of a new generation, politics at home drags you down. Baba above is ashamed that all are pointing fingers at our nation. Pamoja and Umoja, Baba is very disappointed and so is Mami. But we are not just going to sit and cry.

Let me first console my soul:
Everyone is pointing at the country
that you fought for Baba,
and the president does not care!
The ministers do not care!
Judges do not care!
Parliament does not care!

“Nobody can point fingers at this house of mine!” Baba’s words referred to his own home and they meant that no one could take our progress lightly. His style of delivery of those words sounded ritualistic; but it had become a song in his heart; it has become for me his will for our country.

Mami is crying with
pain in her heart for this land.
Many women work and also cry.
Tears are a sign that our bodies and
feelings have a live connection to pain.
But for us, they must begin to mold Change!

I remember Baba gleaming with joy and dreams. The peaks of his happy brown cheeks shone as his skin held them tight. His white teeth looked as good as strong maize. I did look into the middle of his eye and from there; it is as if he would carry me in a trance. I would just listen, hardly talk. Sometimes, he would urge me to talk. When I did, the soft tender skin surrounding his clear eyes would gather into lines of happiness as my words fell one by one the way you take grains of maize off a hot cob. I said to myself inwardly, "you have a sense of power and pride nobody can take from you. It is curled and packed somewhere inside you."

I sing a dirge again for Baba,
my brothers dead and my Motherland.
I wear the sack that the women from Ukambani
slept upon in my childhood and mourn.
When I begin to weave, we shall all retrieve hope.

Fifty years after independence,
will I sing a song that will awaken my land?
Will I sing a song that with words;
and without words,
Will heal my country torn by politics
and hunger for leadership?
My country seen as hunger and strife
while others play up tribalism?

I am in love with Kenya. With all of Kenya and now you know why. You have seen the paths that weave in and out of my heart. Every people, each modern and olden times province is my brother or sister. I am for Kenya, my Motherland.

Marry change oh Kenya!
I woo you knowing you ...
You have nothing to lose!
But all your youth to gain!

And she will laugh again with the memory of Baba, my Grandmother Em and my Grandma En. For my brothers she will cry because they all died young in a country starved of energy.

I remember the rose bush whose branch Mami brought from the flowers that bordered our mud and bamboo house, the one we called Kirosi (rose).

I remember the cutting she carried with joy to join our spirits with all that is beautiful in our earth and in our new house.

The roses, she says, bloom red when some wonderful news is on the way; a birth, a marriage or just some badly needed cash. She tells me it blooms red now for Kenya. She tells me about the soft petals and lilac colors of yesterdays, today and tomorrow bushes.

We shall plant all of them for Kenya's wedding. I showed her a wonderful photograph I have of the Bird of Paradise - Sterlitzia Regina. She told me she was certain that years ago, this wonderful flower, grew here in plenty as a wild flower. I hold her and look into her eyes. We want a wedding full of wild flowers. She told me people must have cut most of the Sterlitzia Regina down so that some now think these are new flowers, atypical. They are not. We have their rugged ancestors.

I show Mami the photograph of the woman whose baby is crying as she lies in cold blood, dead and raped; still in death at Naivasha. This picture I carry on my laptop always. She told me that we must have lost our souls to have done this to somebody. We need a rebirth.

I will take all of these flowers wild and not wild and plant them as we remember Baba singing, Pita running and Elkeingati yearning for us, as we plant new flowers to heal our souls and nation. It is the day Kenyan brothers will help us make a woman called Change and marry Kenya.

These tears have worn out the soft skin that covers the top of my eye. I feel it's tenderest at the corners. I touch it again as the skin around the lower part of my nostrils peels off and looks sore, red and disturbed. I put away the moist hanky before Mami sees me.

She begins to sing the song of the village Singer;
the song maker.

She burns my heart
that is already burning in my soul.

I am awake.

The sun rays are bright and piercing my skin,
but is only the third hour of the morning.

All the flowers burst out again!

The clear air goes deep into my lungs when I breathe in. I can tell the difference between this thin air that invades a space beneath my breasts with freshness and the air in Nairobi even on an early morning. This air that moves around and above Baba's grave is so fresh and light. It reminds me of the light notes of the accordion of the singer.

That singer was Baba's favorite one. He would mention his name and laugh and laugh again when I was little. Baba, you remember, was a happy man who occasionally tried to sweep Mami off her feet and whisk her into a continuous local waltz. Mami would always look like her feet had been stuck onto the ground with gum. Religion bound her dance.

She would with sweeping gestures and a loving smile always interject, "Wee Joji wee!" Memories are sweet.

Now I sweep My Motherland off her feet and we, two big girls are smiling and crying as we dance. In spite of her broken leg and weak knees, she is great. She smiles a smile that lies on her lips like her signature of a life well spent. I think I see Baba, Elekeingati and Pita all back with us. Grandma En is here. This one needs no resurrection. She just does not go anywhere. She is in women's movements, leagues, groups, markets, shops, latest fashion, changes of hair, saving groups... This one never dies. She is lightning. She is still laughing loudly in our eyes, taking her break to confess mighty powers but critical of those who take supernatural power too lightly. She says that God is not hiding in one religion. She praises the brain and practical abilities living like a god. She is powerful in her ancestry. We who inherit her hear her freedom in power. Nothing, nothing frightens her. You should have heard her chide death.

Mami wait for me,
I am coming.
Mami,
dance with me without fear.
Dance like Grandmother in power did.
Where does fear take your faith?
Dance with me free of pain.
Dance in freedom Mami.
You too are a challenger,

hidden in litanies
and Latin.
Nobody will ever know.
You hold on fiercely to your conviction.
Lauda Kenya, I hear you sing again.

Kenya my Motherland dance with me, for I too want to Dance with my country. Dance like Grandmother. You dance with Kenya too. Dance with her and not just from time to time. Hold Kenya and dance with her. You will see her blooming forth. Or will you wait for her to jump up and shake her shoulders like that Maa dancer? Love her. Or will you coo away like the older women when they dance with vibrations in their throats? Come on, hold me and dance with me and Kenya. Let us dance with her. Why the revolution if we are not whole? If we are not dancing? Yet I know that Change is not a dance. Listen. Look. Touch. Smell. Taste. Change.

Headstand

We are Baobab women with all medecines

Hariri asks me what has gone wrong. Why have I stopped my romantic dance and started the difficult almost impossible work. How can we have a revolution if we oppose bloodshed Jogu, Gige and Ong' ask. Listen one and all. Women shed blood all the time. This is our revolution. Sometimes they shed it for custom and of this we come to put an end. Other times biology bids it happen. Women have never been afraid of blood. But not all blood should be shed.

I have to learn to test change. I have to be flexible too. Sometimes surprising unexpectedly.

I have just done a headstand on a patch of green grass. So am not standing on my feet but on my head. Forget how un-customary it is. I have done it. I am standing upside down but this might be my right way up! First my arms are stretched out but now I put them down. I cannot feel my hair but I can feel the ground and my head pressing together. It is my head that is pressing hard; the earth accepts me. My legs are straight up in the air with my toes pointing out to the clouds; right up into the sky. My right big toe with its ragged nail is here. I breathe. Do you remember the Afrika that is in my feet? Look how heavenly it is. AmaZulu: people who are heavenly we all are.

My elbows quickly request the neck to balance well because everything depends on her. My elbows make me understand I have to spread my weight well. My elbows, say they can touch the ground but they are not like feet, they need a firm neck. I survey the horizon of green grass at a grasshopper's range. I see water blue like the clouds come to my eyes, not like tears but like misty dew. I see many blades, many sharp blades of grass. I am breathing even deeper and the blades

of green grass turn into real blades, cutting blades that I now see in darkness before I thump down; plop! Feeling myself whole and challenged but worried and dark inside, I pull out my skirt held tight between my legs, and temporarily turned into trousers. I stand up. I walk on. I know something different. Price to pay. I feel great.

I walk faster and faster and descend a steep hill like child's play. It is a very steep hill. All is silent around me. There is no one, only the sound of running water. I hear some birds singing. I feel like humming with the water. I feel free like running water, but is water fully free, I wonder? I feel happy about everything I see. I see the black water beetle dash so many zig zags, zag, zag all over the water. She is playing with her relatives. That must be her Grandpa and that her Grandma. *Njururi*. I see her. I leave the left river bank, if you think of a river like a person with a head, I know where this one starts and flows. I see little curves where it sort of tries to sit down but cannot, I stare at little living things that squelch and turn into the ground.

Life will return home like that. So soft and peaceful and green. Then the grass on the river bank gets less and less as the other side of the valley begins. The soft life in the middle is held there by the valley for sure. The side of the hill is dry and the red soil loose. The red soil again. The loose and dry red soil that blew over and covered my wet feet like short skin boots has now dropped off and left my lovely dark and black skin with white nails sticking out and a real white and pink hardened sole below. When I stand on the top of the hill and look down to see how far I have come, I am shocked at what I see. All those green blades have turned into steel. They have cut all the soft life around. They have massacred the youth. They have cut the sources of life. The river is filled with blood and sexual violation. Oh, the river of many types of circumcisions is back. International ones and local ones. If you look down on Afrika, you are the new circumciser. Your aiding knife is ugly. You cut her tongues. Afrika's tongues, you circumcise. Her languages. The marriage to Change is again challenged by blood on the knife. The knife can become a machete. I am tired of cuts that kill.

On that soft valley of life dances a woman flanked for her importance. She wears a goatskin for a skirt, her hair is completely shaven off and her head shines. Her breasts swing free between

two loops of soft cloth. Are they more than two? This is not a picture of soft feelings. Her teeth are like fangs. She is not alone. There are many. She asks the women who cut young girls' softest and holy parts with unholy hands why they do it. She also asks why girls who are said to help in better homes are made into slaves oftentimes. She asks questions for all the voiceless.

All the flesh that has been thrown out there for many years is back in the river and the river is bleeding. I am happy am well above the hill, I did not get close to this cut. Is it not the tears of generations that mix with the blood? Is this not what is holding us back? Do not point fingers, change your ways yourselves. Who knows if you are not a circumciser, you and you of African voices? At least in the village they were known. Now you do it in private and try to leave no trace, but the worst trace is hidden in our skirts. Power, change and marriage cannot work with this going on.

"We are in Kiabuuu, they say of Central Province only fifteen kilometers from Nairobi!" Yes, near our house. The house which Baba said no one dared point at. It is a Kenya in which we shall all be intact. That is why I do headstands. I swim. I walk. I think. I lead. I speak. But even today, around us, I hear that this severing that some call 'the cut' still goes on near Nairobi and I shudder. Do not be surprised they tell me. It has been done in Paris, New York and London. Do not blame Allah. Do not blame Christ. None of them are for it. She will bear my grandchild and always boast that unlike us, she is cut and so you cannot beat her at war? She thumps her chest and her grandmother praises her before they leave for the local church service on Sunday. The church does not talk about these old customs. It says they died. Desperate youth unable to explain to themselves the daily pain of lack with which we circumcise them in State House, in Parliament, in Olenguruone, in Eldoret, Kisauni and Burnt Forest, in our government ministries, our churches, multinationals, our universities and everywhere are beginning to look to this pain for salvation! Kenyalin is preparing her herbal medicines but these are not all we need. We left the mud house behind.

No one herds cattle anymore there. The river has dried because it cried blood for too long, leaving only a two feet little sign of hope, to be recovered. The river has dried because we cut off private

parts of so many boys and girls and threw them in there together. We cut our girls and also cut the trees everywhere. For different reasons but mainly greed, we did it. We still do it. We are almost a decade into the millennium and many people do not see how we pretend we are not cutting anybody. We even pretend we are not cutting trees. But the rivers dry up and the black beetles swim zig a zag no more.. Why do you think people equated circumcision with power? Things do not just happen, they are planned. Kenya is she a woman? I see how they have circumcised her as they look for power. I see. She bleeds. The big women of power do not talk about or against this cut. Not those who escaped it. Not those who got it. Do they expect the men to begin this struggle? Many teach children to speak hate and fight. I see Kenya's sons trying to think of desperate measures to save her. Hate is sown in basketfuls by intelligence with an art. A woman in the village is talking about communism. I can hear by the way she pronounces it that she has only heard it, besides, why is the politician she is talking about no longer a human being? Baba remembers how Odanga helped us. He told me no more would he fear a Maragoli as I showed him only trust. Government propaganda machines are well oiled. Some blame the coming of new faiths. Without clean leadership we can justify anything. Kenyalin jumps to offer leadership with many from the diaspora which they refuse to call exile.

Who will bring up Kenya's orphans and widows? HIV blows into Aids and that brings hard times, even when today, it does not mean death. With this door open, should we not quench our alcoholic thirst with plain water? Entire populations are drunk by early morning. Change will show in what we drink. If you marry me and you are always drunk, soon nothing really works. Some drunks are driving but others are sleeping. Alcohol was introduced in some areas too for political equations to balance. How shall we, marry if we kill the Water Towers which our ancestors drunk from? What will keep our herds alive and our wildlife still prowling?

I remember how Pita and I had crossed the big river Tau before it became so little. We had walked from our mud and bamboo house, dressed for work. He would drive a wheelbarrow and my mother would carry all the implements before us. We would join her walking. I remember when we did our metaphysical walk.

We walked along at the edges of the tarmac road where little pebbles and unequal stones invade the grass on the sides. It was as if he was not with us when we started walking. He suddenly wondered out aloud about where we came from. He did not mean that we came from our house in the village. He wanted to know where the being of the human comes from. I remember him like it was yesterday- he was 14 and I then 8. He asked me where we came from. I knew he was not wondering about the village so I told him from our parents. He then asked where they came from asking who was the grandmother of Grandma En. He wanted to know who was our first grandmother and if they were many or just one? We did not know. We knew that after several grandmothers back, we could not lay hold of an area or even a clan. We realised that humans fly out of their perceived orbits. He promised that the sun was not going to move an inch down to scorch us all. We made friends. I do not think we challenged our Mami when we joined her in the shamba. We did not get the answers with names apart from knowing there were many other people before we became people at that particular time. What I remember is that a cause had an effect. Suddenly we did not belong to a tribe or to a district in a province. We were. A feeling and more than a feeling, a realization that we are just moving, on a journey all the time filled us both. We knew we are. We knew we had to be open. On this journey, Kenyalin jumps in anytime and helps me prepare for the wedding of my country to change by changing 'Our Self', 'MySelf'. Being open and ready for the other.

We were filled with joy when we lost explanation as to where we really came from. We thought we felt like Azulu... people without frontiers and barriers...

Unforgettable 1 333 plus

1, 333 times little Ghatt's graveyard seemed to open up in Mami as she heard the news that Kenyans were being killed. 1, 333 people they said, whom I know were more, those who died in Kenya's post poll violence after a standoff on votes results in 2007, seemed to open Little Ghatt's grave somewhere in Mami's soul. Baba's grave

shook. All Mothers in Kenya, all Mau Mau graves were shaking. Kimaathi's winds blew hard in our faces, but they would not listen. Do not imagine the killings were only done by machetes. Behind machetes and guns is money. Money paid some people to work for this side against the other. Behind every powerful man in Africa, there is other power. When De Gado saw Mami, he saw graves opening and shaking. De Gado told me to watch out for Mami. He said, "She may fall with grief and stop being a flagpole. These deaths I see in my country remind me and our Mami of many other deaths. Of my brother going out to greet, call them friends who offered a drink leaving steaming *ugali* just about out of the pot and never returning to eat it. Did he have to find out where our grandmothers came from going there two days before his child was born? These deaths brought back the pain of losing loved ones and not having the possibility of closure with that pain. The taste of injustice is bitter. It kills the minds and souls of the living. How do we close chapters of the pain of a nation without closure? Will you too, who led to this loss of reason, politicians, wave your fly whisks and go, leaving us murdered? Will you get away with lies?

Light that heals skins in the sun
Light that fills the elephant little eye
Light that the cricket sings about
Light that the firefly gives in doses
Light that ripens green bananas
Light that travels faster than plains
Light that is lightning untamed
Come light of the cheetahs eyes and skin
Be our shield in justice, Oh light.
Be our spearless protection.
Talk to the minds of the world.
Let a real Court of Justice breathe.
Breathe back light of knowledge and strength.
May all warlords get the rickets
and tickets to leave.
May they find their tongues slow and sticky.
May they withdraw their spears in hate speeches,
May they find no ears to hear them.

And how I wish I could always point a finger for Pita's death at some stranger out there, someone from another community, but no. The finger points back at no stranger. We feed people who get strong to kill us. We give them power of radio, TV and newspapers. They swallow us like the ogres of old.

Pita was young, vibrant and brilliant; like Kenya. Dancing, Like Kenya. In love, like Kenya. De-tribed and in communion with all.

We at home and from home pass for anyone. Hamisi, Achieng', Auma, Akilitelek and others are not only in books in our home. Many women and children who lie in cold blood are my nation in 2007, not you who raises a book of peace to swear war.

Where shall I hide my tears?

I tried to parent for Pita.. it is hard.

How do I parent Kenya?

I tried to write for Pita, I could not.

How do I write for Kenya?

We wanted to keep better memories and memorabilia.

We strung his bicycle up in the ceiling for years, just to keep seeing it.

I wanted Kenya to ride this bicycle and to fly.

I wanted so much.

I wanted him to live and to see his children and he working on laptops and talking on mobile phones. We wanted him to see them off at airports and to receive them back. We wanted him to see them make their first steps in professions. I would have loved Pita to tell his own children why he run to Baba, whom he did not know, and got hugged and hoisted on Daddy's body flag first!

When I do my headstand on Mt. Kenya in my mind, when I headstand at the KICC and see Kenyatta's statue upside down, the highest peak, I watch every valley, every river, the ocean, the forests, the fires, the graveyards, the planes flying around. I have dreams. I want to see my flag. I want my country back. Black for the people who are green as land, vivid red for the price of freedom, white for peace in Kenya.

Not without mother and son!

This is not a still picture. She moves even now. A woman in Mt. Elgon checks in her handkerchief knot to carefully see if her voter's card is still in there. Another one does it in Kiabuu, in Kisumu and Mombasa. In Elgon, she rubs against her identity card and she feels glad. She does not want to speak as she votes. She fears that someone will come to bribe her with tribe. She is not voting for a person. She is there voting for a country; one nation. She is voting for food. She is voting for her children's freedom. She thinks she is voting for life and blood to continue flowing in her limbs from her heart. She is in there, voting for land for her descendants. She is in there, voting for a job for her daughter, for justice and peace.

They dipped your little finger in violet ink. The mark is still there but her fingers have no life. Her voice is gone. She is cold. There is no one to hush her baby. Lullabies are stolen in mid-air.

Mother of Naivasha, your seven month old son has been demented by Kenya. They killed you because you are from this Kenya, a Kenyan. You had married a man from the other Kenya, a Kenyan. When did they put politics in our beds? Kenya is made to hate her own children. Her children are fed on political venom. This is not ethnic. This is not tribal; this is political poison.

Our national and provincial languages are full of peace. My heart is rent. This time, it is you on the cross of the ground where they raped you. They strangled you! They threw you into your door and you fell just past it. It is you nailed to the ground with blows. It is you unprotected. Who will hold you and hold Naivasha, Mother? Why Mami has our Motherland done this to us? Our little son cannot hold you. He screams with fear. He knows you loved him and that they have hurt you. He has seen it. And you lie with your eyes open and dead. Black eyes.

Tell those who argue that there was a wave of violence coming to engulf Nairobi so that Naivasha had to die, tell them that they lie. We still have police helicopters. We have what it takes to stop chaos without protecting State House first.

SMSes instead flew from phone to phone calling for fundraising and signing in young men to kill. My friend, you contributed to money for weapons because in the future you would like to go to Parliament.

De Gado tried to stop them. We know that. But his voice was unheard and his life endangered. It was you who sat on top who let violence out. Young men with clear minds tried to stop it. The Mother of Naivasha did not die alone. Mothers everywhere died and many were raped. Their daughters too were raped and killed. Babies died and cried everywhere without lullabies.

May you find questions facing you
before you close your eyes at night.
May you hear the howling screams of
people who voted in peace each time
you open an envelope.
Everytime you un-purse your lips,
may the envelope with the list of names
of all the people who died,
fall out screaming before you.
May they remind you that justice and
reconciliation begin in truth!

Look at her and hear my words.
Mother of Naivasha,
you seem to hold up the little finger even in death.
Voted.
You exercised your civic duty.
Who will redeem the vote?
I am devastated Mami.
Strong woman grieve Kenya.
On your bed in your little room,
I can see your husbands gray checked shirt.
They took him first, wa Naivasha.

Let me hug your baby,
My son.
You are Kenya's most aggrieved orphan;
the orphan of misrule.
You are Kenya, orphaned.
It was not disease or starvation that made you so.
It was the vote.
May the people rise.

Mr President, are you here with us in the same country?

This is not a photograph, it is a life that lives and is fixed in our brain as if nailed in there with nails made of fire. Her little boy, perched on a wooden chair cries loudly as his Mother lies in cold blood. I know this is only one of so many orphans, but I am looking at this one now. He looks like my country then:

.A land without a Mami.
A land without a Baba.
And you slept well that night.
Snored.

That night after I saw that,
I could not sleep.
The image hit my mind,
like a burning lightning.

I will never find my sleep again.
We cannot make peace
with people without a conscience.
I kneel down beside,
my Mother here.
She is my church.

"I can see Mother that before they took your life, they raped you. That cloth over your thighs covers their shame. Now you lie in cold blood. The blood has moved and haloed your head. Your words and screams are still written in it. Blood out of your mouth and ears. Blood out of your nose. Blood out of your holy vaginal canal.

You are a martyr, a red cloth flung on you. What shall I say to remain sane? That this is my new flag? Martyred Mother, the shrill cry of your son wakes me up forever. Your daughter was still in your womb.

I remember Pita. Sorrow dark and painful strangles my heart, strangles my soul. Mother, all you did is vote without even remembering the tribe of your husband. Now they take your life and call it a tribal matter. This little boy, I know will live with the image of his mother's head framed in blood. I saw him crying last night too.

In broad daylight, I saw the little boy refusing to take the hands of those who held him. He cried until he slept and slept until he cried. I dreamt I had gone in search of him. I would then babble to myself and wonder about his sisters. He would never know how to fly like I did when I was little.

He will always be afraid of the color red when our flag is raised. I found him. His face said he would never play with any little sisters or brothers. He said he would never see his mother and father again.

I found him. I saw that he would never live in the same place again in his life. He would always be a traveller. Always on his way to look for something, but truly always for someone.

Mother, on that 27th day of December 2007, very early in the morning, you queued in your worker skirt and even a shirt. For your land you were ready to wear anything. To walk shoe free, to make some money. If only that little finger dipped in violet ink had foretold violence. I wish you could live again and see how I divorce tribe and politics played the way it is!

I thought of that little boy who would never run to anyone anymore, he could not even run as yet. He was too young to know and yet he knew. How was he to understand why she had warm hands before but now they turned cold?

I will not take my 'divorce' to Sheria House and may a smiling Attorney General's never return there, for those chambers must collapse! I will do it at the Free Corner.

What had tribe given woman all this time if for their sons to free they took off all their clothes, old women, showing what should be taboo for us to see?

Shame has overtaken the reasoning of a nation. The Mothers at Freedom Corner cursed all oppression and injustice in Moi. You thought you will manage to bring it back to us and to make it stay? No. That Mother and her unborn daughter whom you killed, his father, that Boy and this nation -like Sundiata of Old Mali- will stand up again.

I remember my cup full of red beans. I will raise it again. It will turn into the golden cup that has the map of Kenya and for which bells ring whenever it is raised. I shake but I speak.

Do not ask me why I am so wounded. I received my wounds in the house of friends also. I want to dance, but I walk around with my wounds open for this Motherland. I walk around with my wounds open for this child of Kenya. I walk around with my wounds open to see if I can find the milk of kind justice, love and compassion.

Today's power has adulterated our languages -our homes- where we belong. They pretend the languages only carry hate and shame. But we knew our verbs and our proverbs before. Our vocabulary. These bore herbs of healing on a train of hope. They still carry wisdom for every station in our nation. They carry honey. When they carry poison, it has been milked from the snakes in the bushes that should cure our cancers. Healing venom is carried abroad. I sing you Mother.

Thula Mama, Thula, Thula Mama, Thula Mama Thula.
Pole Mama, Pole. Pole Mama, Pole Mama Kenya!
Mos, mos, mos, Mama, Mos, mos! (Pole Mama!)
Ringa, mama!
Tenge'rai Maitu!

Samueli Kifuitu, who will take my son home to greet his Grandmother? The country is burning.

Hariri, who like Jibril will bring us good news?

Blow the horn, blow
Take your country women and men, children and even you lions.
Elephant take and keep control. Jogu. Your memory. Take your country and sing to it. Let them not ever cheat you again to kill your neighbor.

Do not wait for the bishops.

They fell at the crossroad and abandoned the cross instead of standing and starting. They forgot the 777 stations of the cross endless. Women remain in Pilate's hands and the nation too. See how they wash their hands quickly. Pilate's wife should stop whispering. She must yell that the people are crucified again.

Do not wait for the priest, he goes down from Nairobi to Kisumu through Naivasha and sees no neighbor.

There is a lonely misty and mystical silence that surrounds this place in the Rift Valley. It is embraced by a god whose touch is crispy silence. I feel the power of place and being. Silence hovers everywhere. Silence on nature. Silence on the dry twigs of the leaves that surround the Great Rift Valley Lodge ensconced in the greatest valley in the world formed by the movement of tectonic plates, scientists say many years ago. I sing, I work.

Who shall we wait for? A good speaker may not be a good performer. How shall we de-link food from the vote? How government from eating? If you illustrate inspiration as yellow ripe bananas that hit the first pangs of hunger it looks more real.

Our leaders must be those who do not take for granted that their service must be highly paid. They must be the ones who let us produce the food ourselves. Then we will not beg for a little food in order to support this or that political group.

Whispering over lake Turkana

All of us, Let us join hands with Pamoja, De Gado, Hariri, Umoja and all of us: Acheing', Ang' Kenyalin, Jogu, Gige... all of us. It is a new world. Everything is different from anything I have seen in Kenya. I put my hard brown ankle high boot on the ground on a piece of black rock. It was as if the hard boot refused to step properly on the hard ground. It would have looked like I turned my right foot inside my boot but no, it just happened that I saw my foot look up at me, and from under its sole was the rock's cutting wedge which had been hiding in the very hot sand.

I do not know why but before even my foot was right, my right index finger, middle and thumb were feeling one of my hairs lock. Was it a dreadlock? It was one strand almost in the middle of my head. It felt good, natural and spongy but it was beginning to stand up on its own. The rising sun was already warning me that it would be very harsh in time.

"It gets fresh closer to the lake," said the driver knowingly. He had lived here for at least six years now. This is a place I had not been to. It was fascinating to look all around me and see flat and rough ground; black rock. Frightening to feel the distance and alienation from Kenya's capital.

I was warned that some snakes hid in such hot sand. My throat felt as if it had been smoked and dried up. I closed my eyes lazily as some women walked past me stopping to stare and trying to speak to me first in their language, and then in Kiswahili. We have a language we can share and a struggle to eat together. This is Northern Kenya. Here the woman whose skin- especially under and around her eyes- has got used to gathering like honey to protect itself from the hot sun thinks I am a foreigner. She asks me when I would be returning to Kenya.

Her husband, who only wears a piece of a rough old blanket over his shoulder and covering a part of his loin stops and crossing his left leg on top of his right knee leans on his long walking stick to rest. He is long! He is a very handsome man. His various earrings swing in the wind. I can see he has only this one cloth across his chest for many years. And there is no water to wash it. It is cleaned by the wind. When he rests, his wife sits in a nearby bush somewhere.

They see me as a very well off person; one who is advanced. In traditional times, one could not be progressive and not be wealthy. In those times, one's wealth was measured also in the beauty and ability to use language full of wisdom. This couple thought I had much money from America. Whatever I did, my ways, they said were more western than African. It was not a new story. They had called me a stranger in my own home town when I looked for a stronger voice.

The woman asked me questions about Kenya. She has been inside the boundaries but outside the nation for many years now. I could not tell her that she was in Kenya.

I had chosen to wear what I always saw as my magical Kanga with wonderful words. It is of lovely leopard prints. It is beige and black. The words imprinted on one of the two pieces, as all *Kangas* bore messages, are "*Kenya, will you marry me?*"

In this dry land, I will speak to my love.

I am really in love with Kenya. Truly, all of Kenya and not parts. It can grow together. I want it all complete. I love not the lake on its own but these people here too. Why I'm I a stranger in my land? There are many people who are like me but they do not know that. There are others who living in the relative comfort of middle and upper class life disdain my *Kangas* and more so, the message. Who? Marry What? Why, When, How? But I keep singing, Kenya, will you marry me?

On the day I proposed, I was confident. I was wearing that leso or a Kanga over my long skirt. I had another Kanga below, the one which read, '*Mpenzi Kenya, utanioa kweli mimi Mageuzi?*' (My beloved Kenya, Love, will you marry me, Will you truly marry me who is Revolutionary Reform?) Another Kanga I slung around my shoulders and it read, '*Chanda chema huvikwa pete*'- a good finger gets a ring slipped on it. As for my *akala* shoes, shoes made up of old tyres, I

had to leave them in the house and wear tough boots. It was better to be hot than risk the bite of a thirsty and perhaps angry poisonous snake.

The Lake is far away from home, so far away. I have not been here. But I have flown over this land often. In Addis, people spoke about human rights in whispers. They said if you spoke about them loudly, you ended up not speaking at all. But at the airport they said I was an Ethiopian, one of their own, and invited me to stay. They had not heard that am related to a gazelle that jumps rocks and that therefore, I flew. In Ghana, they will understand that fast. In the west people introduce themselves and mention the animal they are related to. Most tourists want to see our animals without our stories with our animals. In many parts of Afrika, we have lost our relatives the trees. The ancestors are asking questions. We cannot be healthy without one of us: the tree, the river, the animal, the person. In Cairo, the men wanted to know if Change was home and many subtle messages told one that a woman not safe without it. In Dakar, they were quiet before suddenly bursting into song and singing to smother me with sweet music. It was as if no-one sensed my taste or any trouble coming. Savaiva, I am the gazelle that jumps from the South to the North. Azulu receive me. We cannot survive unless we move, unless our ideas move and we become one.

I am now singing on the shores of Lake Turkana. I hear songs in reply. I go down to the shores and first sit on my legs. I fall on my knees and then I lean my back behind me. I am comfortable sitting on my own legs. I do this to get closer to the level of the lake. I have done this at the shores of the Indian Ocean too. I blew letters of all alphabets on its waters and they went all over the world. I must remember my dream.

Last night I dreamt I was walking for many miles with rugged cloths full of color but which blew in the wind so that little grains of sand hit at my uncovered stomach. I was feeling pain as this sand entered my eyes but I was determined to move on. The cup in my right hand, held out before me was empty. I was looking for water to drink. Then the dream changed. I was trying to catch drops of rain. They fell slowly and very far apart, so far that when one drop touched my parched lips; I still had the cup held out before me, I could see the next drop three meters away. I woke up with a parched and dry throat, panting.

At the lake I love, I sing my songs, whispering to the waves as the black, black rocks look at me and join in the chorus that is about my love.

How can I forget you?
Is it possible even for a while?
How can I forget you, you,
Of the black soil, black rocks and
Black people beautiful.
You are hot and thirsty
Cold and hungry sometimes, oftentimes, dying.
Where should I go but to you,
My Mother and my hope?
I wish to see you young again!
How can I forget you?
As when you were young,
when you are now old,
I see you.

Slightly narrowing my eyes and feeling the trembling wet wind pass by my face, I remember that song; *"Tutanyakua uhuru wetu, tutakomboa nchi yetu... utamaduni na viwanda vyetu.. Kenyaaaa! Nkosi sikelel iAfrika!"* We shall get back our freedom. We shall liberate our land.. our cultures and our industry... in Kenyaaa, God bless Afrika."

How can I irrigate you with my love? The old couple come closer and stare at me. I owe them an explanation and am not the Head of State, nor their MP. How can I make the politicians feel? What should it take for them all to see that they owe the children whose faces are covered with flies much more? How can I tell everyone that this starving mother who has long and deep cuts in the soles of her feet is our Kenya, our Afrika?

Inside that old cut in the soles of her feet, inside there, is a world that only she knows even as her chest heaves and drops, heaves and drops tomorrow with the beautiful necklace spiraling from her neck. Close to her ears or just above her uncovered breasts the humming will start. As the necklace moves in circles just how can I tell her that this is her land as much as the President's and that we should pave the road where she walks. How can I tell her that

we can sing and dance together? Have I not betrayed her? Should not guilt be my daily drink, the dregs?

She looked at me, Kenya, now a woman dressed in beads. She with the beads that united her to Somalia and Sudan and so many lands not only in Asia but also in Eastern Europe. She with the beads that held straight her neck allowing a neckline to come down at Lake Turkana; she, the Kenya that danced in my dream that night. She sang with beads moving up and down her heaving chest. She sang in her own language that became ours. This is how she sang as she tried to lift up her cow with its calf, both of them dying of starvation. As she counted the ribs on the big side of the mother cow on whose flank was seared unmistakably with burning tongs, the map of Kenya. I heard her sing. She said she was ready for Change.

I put out the message of my love for Kenya all over the lake like the sun god puffing out water to the wind in Mexico. It was on the crest of every small wave. I spread all over Lake Turkana. The message was taken by each droplet of water to the next, till entire waves lit up with it. It moved all over the lake and then swirled out like that skirt I used to wear when Baba would throw me up into the wind and move round and round with me swinging out of the palms of hands fingers tightly clasped. The message then flew from the pleats of the skirt and entered every fishing basket that the people had launched into the lake. The fishes did not change color. The message went up and under and connecting with rivers and lakes of Kenya: My Sango (Victoria) of Afrika, Naivasha, Nakuru, Elementeita in the Rift Valley and even Chala in Taita Taveta. Everywhere the message of love was taken as if in a chain of soft frogs eggs, promising life to life. The message began to drip from the lips of those who drunk water. The lakes connected with the River Tana and the Athi. Nzoia, Nyando and even Nairobi carried the message to the Indian Ocean which said it had not heard this before as the waters had been too spicy, killing all coral reefs.

The message swells in the Nile. Oh, Nilo sometimes I dream I comb your delta head, your hair flying, I toss you up in the air -like a child-god Musa playfully enchanted swimming busily in your reeds. We are for love and laughing, and then I fling us out and you water all my dry Nubia, Our Africa, Our Nilo.

The Indian Ocean peacefully embraced the message and at Lamu remembered how Gandhi visited and was careful not to get left behind and tricked to take women. Always women. The Turkana and the Teso men and women are our people. The twelve year old who was married off to an old man sometime back I began to see. They tell me they have heard that early marriages are not an option today. I nod my head but it is up to them to do their headstand. Gandhi's people are still trying to do theirs.

Now I think of the people in Turkana as often as I walk up pavements in Nairobi. I think of the times she has gone looking for water and berries to survive on. I think of her. I see Parliament is very far from her.

At my feet suddenly beads of all colors rise to meet my fascinated eyes. Some laces of long well strung beads of all hues cover the ground. The anointing of the earth is here. The beads dance in the sun on the ground. The eyes of Ruksana, dance with joy at the corners and they shine like her own beads. She was the first woman government vehicle driver in North Eastern Kenya, remember?

The Bird of Paradise and the missing signatures

Pamoja and Umoja, we have fought each other to the ground long enough. Let us fight to fly off the ground together. So it was end of December 2007 and the year 2008 was into its second month. Finally, do you see that it is pens and not pangas that do it? That it is not signatures but many words and works that will heal us? That afternoon of February, the flurry was on for preparation of a Harambee signature by a couple of Kenyans. I wanted to sign it too for the orphan of Kenya and the widow; but they ask me, “Eeh, You, who do you think you are?”

Mocked like this, I still remain watching but on the sides. It was signed by principals whose war problem it was, they told us. The woman who took her last chicken to the *harambee* before elections and who, pregnant was raped in her room at Dandora Phase Four did not sign it. Her mother who was also raped as she was forced to watch how they did it to her mother after her own ordeal did not sign this peace deal. Raped women did not get justice, they got the HIV virus. Some saying they are Non governmental also refused to help them. The woman who was raped together with her daughter, shrunk in size the very same day. She left on a long journey to no one knows where. She told her daughter not to bother to follow her but to give the miscarried child her name before she buried it. She warned her to bury it and not to flush it down a toilet or leave it on a garbage heap. She said she had to leave. When someone said the word ‘police’ near her, it is said her head exploded with a string of curses that the earth had never heard before.

The relatives of the children who were thrown back into a burning church from which they had escaped did not sign the peace into their hearts. It is not only one woman who withdrew and shrunk in size. Some men did too. They also could not bear any more children.

It was not only one woman whose daughter was in the same room and pregnant too as they were raped who shrunk in size. Fifty men on top of her. Her daughter could not survive the miscarriage, she slept forever and died soon after. This is what her mother had run away from. She knew it was coming. Death on all winds. She and her dead foetus did not sign peace. This girl just like the woman in Naivasha, died with the Kenyan nightmare on top of her, in her womb, heart and soul.

Kenyalin begins to sing songs of resistance and defiance saying the time had come to change everything. Soon no one could distinguish her voice in the thick mix of voices that followed from all over the world.

But for the moment, the peace deal was being signed. When the peace deal was signed, I stood up, looked at the sunset from the beautiful view of our tiny balcony. All the maize in the sunny fields clapped. The rags too clapped. The sun refused to set over Kenya. I looked out into the garden, and saw a Bird of Paradise fluttering its petals like wings...perhaps all those were the departed, determined to fly again! I went down to it. The beautiful flower held in its green foundation, looked up at me. It wanted so to open its petals. It was the only flower the fire had not burned. It had felt the scorching sun but had refused to die. Its stalk was green. Some of its petals turned from orange to red in me. Its almost open petals flipped white and my black hand held it firmly.

Now in the light of the setting sun... it was a flag tainted orange by the setting sun – all colors screamed boldly. It told me it was Kenya, eager for change.

I walked on bare ground to ascertain the afternoon was real. It was local long black hair I had seen on TV tinted golden by the light of sun that shone outside Harambee House Nairobi, the office of the President. It was not all Kenya that watched but the whole world saw- the handshake! I insisted on the signatures from Dandora Phase Four. We wanted to see Agenda Four come to life. We wanted to see it beside all holy scriptures, all of them declaring peace from our traditional roots. Kenyalin begun to work. Agenda Four was baptised constitution and the bishops said no. The people won.

The signature moment: the world's cameras were all solemnly on five men. Kofi Annan, Raila Amollo Odinga, Benjamin Mkapa,

Jakaya Kikwete and Emilio Kibaki. Men. 'Peace to men of goodwill!' This is the moment we are tasked to take and hold. But how shall we?

Some women bent under heavy loads, somewhere on a long and winding mud road were talking to their dream...the dream that De Gado, Oko, Kenyalin and Savaiva lived with their broken hearts, limbs and souls. They sang to it. They had refused to die. They sang of their dead colleagues. They had sang and spoken words every night in the days of their lives. They had written and read letters everyday in the nights. They had sent them from broken limbs to broken hearts and limbs.

Sacred

Theirs are the moments I want to take and hold like a god. Theirs is the moment I want to recreate in every sphere of our lives, into our lakes and rivers and mountains, into our humanity. And that is why am going to the Post Office, the one at Freedom Corner to post this letter to the people in Kenya. Let us deepen our consciousness.

The bird of paradise changed from a plant into a real bird and it began to sing and fly to every corner of the land. It asked me to listen. It said it would post the letter in all the huts and homes abroad. Far in the distance of my being, deep in me, the bird seemed sunken in my navel and it sang to me. From a distance, I heard the song of the village singer again. He had changed his language. He now sang in Samburu. The language of the people who are so beautiful and do not say it, that legend records that some visitors thought they were butterflies. Sampururrr. My heart leapt with joy when the singer sang their proverbs. How had he learnt their language I asked him? He told me that deep longings of sight had taken him to many places. He told me that many languages had willfully given him their treasures. He asked me to promise not to give up for one but changed Kenya, and not pieces of Kenya. I did. He spoke of a leader who is not a politician but who could do political work.

What leader, what Kenya? I asked the village singer. He told me in all languages of Kenya there is leadership. Many, some of them languages unheard before were new to our ears. Like the Bird of

Paradise, they had lain hidden in our land. In this changed Kenya lie hidden many great treasures. The Kenya we love wants change. The singer said again that he is a prophet whom politicians in our land fail to listen to because he is not in fancy clothes. He now sang a new song of hope; the song of the bird of paradise, the paradise Kenya is without politicians who ride tribal cars and who steal from the poor.

The Kenya that would change and allow every woman and man to enjoy of the sweat of their brow. The Kenya where people could honestly vote change and see results adding up and added up without bloodshed. The Kenya whose flag my parents would hoist up with all their children dead and alive. The Kenya that heard justice, peace, progress and patriotism in all its languages; the Kenya that had endured and outlived the pain- filled Kenya.

His song about beautiful Kenyans full of dreams and hopes, young and shaking with dew and fruits from every branch was the song Kenyalin led and Savaiva, Pamoja, Umoja, Hariri and all the others made a full chorus with the word Change:

Kenya, will you marry Me? Change!
I am a proud woman, Change!
Yet humble for I pray my truth,
Change, Mageuzi- reform!
I want only the best, Change!
Kenya will I marry you?
Geuza! You change it, reform it.

I left those in the west,
Jigeuze- change yourself!
Kenya, will you marry me? Change!
I eat well and dress well,
Geuza, Change yourself!
Kenya, will you marry me? Change!
I am defiant and know my rights, Change!
Kenya, will you marry me? Change!
I lead at ease in church and outside Parliament,
Change! Reform!
Kenya, will you marry me? Change!

I carry the pot to break outside State House on my head. Change!
Reform. To break a pot traditionally, is to break all ties, to agree to
lose all if for best it be! To show anger. To report it to the ancestors,
you drop the pot on the droung. Change.

Kenya, will you marry me? Change! Reform!
I wear resistance on my breasts, Change!
Kenya, will you marry me? Change!
On my heart, legs, words and dance; Change!
Both local wear and designer label, Change!

They are labeled resistance, Change!
It means resistance, Change! Reform!
peaceful resistance; Change!
Kenya, will you marry me? Change! Reform!
Kenya, will you marry me?! Reform today!
like Baba before, Change!
Dare change cultures.
Kenya will I marry you?
Reform!

My name is resistance change-in -reform!
In the face of pain that is my nation,
Torn into pieces and burning
before my eyes,
because of votes for men,
My name is resistance but not violent.

I sing to our waters,
Organized and leading with others,
Moving ahead with the youth
Drinking camel milk
Walking and working along with you
Dancing to the music of all our peoples
In all their tongues longing and saying to you again
My name is Change, Kenya, will you marry me?
Reform.
Let us make these mistakes past now!

You are so beautiful my beloved,
The sun rises and sets in you gently,
over rivers and valleys and desert,
sea and mountains.
You are so wonderful my country.
You allow me to walk on you, you make me.
The moon of change rises and sets in you...

Change will melt in,
and rise again...to meet the stars...
And I wish you to marry, and if you would, marry me.
But the pain of estrangement is hidden in your eyes.

Why this map of pain?
Kenya, will you marry me?
My happiness would fill the earth and the seven seas
And we could take away the pain if you marry me.
But how will you marry me,
if they mutilate you and me so?

Tell them to leave your body alone.
I cannot live and watch you marry violence.
You marry pain, I would you married me,
Change whilst changing.
I died the death of love- change,
Only together can we both rise again.
Change.

I have put
A triangle across Kenya,
uniting people and people,
sharing land and resources.
And mixing peoples,
with different genes
and stories.
Kenya will be home when you do this.
The North can have part of the South,

who said your compass cannot dance?
The east can have a part of Central
and North.

Who said you only knew once chance?
But here.

It is my warning before your eyes
with red and yellow phosphorescent lights it blinks
so that you do not have another nightmare,
accidents you have had none, it was in designed.

Stop.
And think.
Before the politician,
takes your song,
and makes it his.
Takes the church
and makes it hers.
Takes your granary,
and eats all your maize.
Takes your vote,
and turns it into hate blood.
Takes your dreams,
and turns them,
into nightmares.
Look.
See.

You might see me in the wind.
and think you know me.
In a whirlwind that begins to gather dust
at your feet,
dancing a little bit,
blows and is over,
and you say you have seen me,
but you have not.

You might see me in papers
that come out freshly from a printing press
with words impressed on them
like kisses, and,
after many years of fear and pain,
talking and say you have seen me,
you have not.

You might see me in the rain after a drought.
You might see me in a river that washes its banks
as it shrinks year after year and say you saw me.
I am not here.
Know my name.
I want you to
Know who I am.
so that you will know me
when we meet.

I introduce myself early,
to wipe out confusion.
Names are important to me,
call me by my real one.
There are too many fake ones
floating around.

You tired of
hearing the word Change
I take particular care,
Change is my name.

My name like it or not
gets mutilated often.
You can hardly recognize her,
for all the circumcisional cuts.

In the mouth,
You tell her not to speak.
On her body
not to move.

On her head,
you take her hair off,
damning her river of reason,
you cut her again.
My name, you ban.
My hands you restrict
to my own body.
From my feet you cut
moves.

And in my heart
you mutilate my love.
And I come back proposing anew.
I am made of love.
My brain is all over me.
My feet can tell you,
I must move,
I must talk.
See Change.

Don't mix me up with
coins or even bank notes,
that a fat politician
brings you for an election
talking about an erection.
I am not bar change
Am not shop change.
Be it big or small.
You laugh.
That is what you make
me during elections,
when they see votes.
Small change,
big only in money.

Destructive.

I am Change,
Not in a language that means
turn the other side,
of the same coin.
I am change not in languages
that mean replace.
I take new forms,
and walk through them
alive like fire that welds
not burns to ashes.

Like Mau Forest,
I shed all my moisture.
to Trans-Nzoia river,
I want to pass by and leave
new shoots of sugarcane.
In leadership too,
the Nyando flows.

From Kipkarren to Koru,
I will re-fly my works.
In the Tana,
new life without crocodile
messages of death.
Mbagathi will go to Athi
and will listen.
I do not have many rivers
embrace me now,
before the Nile leaves you
and Sango laughs.
Atrocity to behold
nyawawa defeated.

Let me re-make my lakes.
the Nile
Must do that in Afrika.

When they say I have come,
I have not, till the people
you see, rise and embrace me.

When I come,
like for new shoots of cane,
there will be songs,
sang in every *matatu* and hut,
that remain of the past
chewing me.

Look me as a people,
all eyes and ears.
I am not one person,
I must sit tall in institutions,
Beginning with the *matatu*.
Universities respected for learning,
hospitals and schools running.

If you want to know when freedom is about to die
Look there in those two places, universities
and *matatus*,
Police in attitudes with class,
Bodies most holy;
trashed with laughter and cheer.

Look at State House;
it is built on a wetland.
Relocate it.
Take it to dry lands,
Or lake lands.

Look at dead words in the place of parole,
Parliament.
Move it.

And at best,
build it on the Athi that flows,
so it sees Kilimanjaro
and is reminded of Nyerere,
as it passes through our villages
and speaks our hearts,
as it flows through deserts,
and feels our pains.

I told you when you marry me,
You will not need to be told,
How sweet I can be.

You will sow Change,
in your own smiling fields,
pregnant with crop and honey money.
Sow it
In ringing freedom in the media,
where the machete of tongue and pen hide.

Before you fail to see me
Look how beautiful you are,
in the mirror of change.
Change.
Love me.

The Exodus

Kenyalin, Eboni, Achieng' **and** Ong' call the others.
Let us arise and go.

We walked down the wide and winding tarmac path that goes downhill to our gate in a city flat, my little friend and I, talking and laughing about many little things.

"Yesterday," She said, "I revised very well for my math exam."

"Well done! That's great, Good!"

The evening before she had told me everyone needed Math in their career including writers- even beggars, she added with a weighty sense. And I had ceased the moment to tell her how a blind man I saw felt his notes. He would slowly pass his thumb and index finger now over this bill and then the next. Smiling he would say how much. Fifty! He said with a slight smile, a hundred! The smile got bigger and then, almost unbelieving when he touched the next note, filled with wonder exclaimed: five hundred!

My little friend was smiling at my acting and she fell back laughing. Her many young friends gathered around us as we spoke of counting.

"They all need to count," in the Electoral Commission or else we find another way of voting Change, he said before asking me to help him solve a question. "What is the minimum number of sweets needed for 8 boys and 15 girls to have an equal share?" Before I could ask if a quarter for each would also be an equal share, she asked, "What is the land required to feed, educate, train and employ 38 million Kenyans who will soon double that figure?"

Children are asking.

Leaders, make a strategic plan and follow it, to feed a nation. What must the land that is producing nothing become? Do you sell it to another country to make food for the world pretending that we cannot irrigate our parched up land?

I began to explain how some Kenyans were left out in this equation and question. That is the reason why I had now broken another pot outside Parliament and Treasury where all fires begin. Who bolts the doors of a whole nation?

Kenyalin and I walked down cheerfully. Well. We reached near the gate and she asked me for my colorful jacket with vivid colors, like Afrikan colors, the one from Guatemala since it was cold and she had forgotten hers. I gave it to her. I asked her to put it on and walk. I wanted to see if she could really ‘fit’ in my activist jacket sent to me by a woman activist through an American woman activist. Well, it was just manageable. Activism must be global for us to survive.

I am in my leadership dress. I feel the cold air get deeper and deeper into my lungs as I go now up this slight hill and down this valley jogging along on flat parts that surround State House Road. I am now coming down the last hill, it is steep. The motorists are going into town on my extreme left – we drive left here – there is hardly any traffic facing me, as this is the lane that goes to residential areas.

I am smiling inside. I know. Straight ahead of me, is a new Parliament, simple doors open for new people. I turn the corner at the junction that turns back to the flat. Always this is the corner in which I meet some young men walking fast. KawangwareKenya is a slum far from here, but they walk far to work and return home walking. They flow to and from KiberaKenya too. *Descamisado*, shirtless. *Desabrigada*, without warmth of coats. I hear them speak and I know they are Nelson Mandelas still at Robben Island. I know they are slaves still at Goree Island. I jog to keep mind alert, I keep to the edge for them to pass.

Hariri- As beautiful as beauty

Hariri. Your name means beauty. Fear kills beauty, all wisdom and truth. Do you remember this rural woman who said to the powers above in Ukambani, “Niwatunenga thayu! You have granted us peace. The peace of eating what there is to eat without fear, no matter if it be cassava for Christmas!”

She went on about the peace of saying what is to be said where we are without fear. I sensed space. If you do not allow my space inside of me, I have no peace. She wants to fight the violence of poverty, there is no water near and that breeds fear. There is no sacred space here. The men drink a lot of cheap alcoholic brews. They lose their sight. They cease to see spaces. But they are there back to drink again even if blind. They go there before the first church bell tolls on a Sunday. The lack of food and jobs; she sighs and cries about, but the men gulp in their steaming local brews. The pain of the aged and orphaned; the sick and dying she creates space for and lifts it up in a temple. The men drink harder drinks.

Hariri.

Step forward, Hariri with your beauty and strength. Now step back, turn and clap and stop and clap. Little girls dressed in *kangas* that show pictures of justice equal on scales, swing again and again, graciously yet vigorously in a row of two. Am moving. This is KambaKenya.

I look to my right and the two zebra I see at a distance look like paintings of moving beauty. A couple of young giraffe, one Maasai the other Somali, move graciously heads above the thorn trees. I am filled with delight and once again, song comes out of me as it did in the wind of the beautiful hills!

Hariri Kenya, Beautiful Kenya!

You are as beautiful as a rainbow without the lies and spears of the politician, Kenya my love. You are as beautiful as those people in you who love honesty and truth and work. You are as beautiful as the truth of those who know it is always important to leave space for another even if it is an animal. You are as beautiful as De Gado who rides a bicycle in areas where the media can only fly above for fear, when they report fires. I see the little flower that comes out of sandy ground with the purity of coral pink and hails life. It is red. Because it is daring, they will call you of the devil. You are as beautiful as those who bear a message of hope regardless of color and ethnic group. Beautiful like the hill emerging from the mist of the morning in the Rift valley, in KambaKenya, in the Hurri Hills of North Eastern Kenya. You are beautiful as Kofia Mbaya Hill is without a poor pilot who risks landing without vision. You are as beautiful as light and as pure clean rain water. You are as beautiful as the camel that walks without ceasing carrying the Nabo, the home of the SamburuKenya; and sometimes carrying books across to Marsabit and Laukitaung. You are beautiful as the driver who takes time to lower speed and drives carefully again, because anything mechanical can fail. You are beautiful my Kenya, as beautiful as the hands of the mechanic and his soul; he still smiles and I did not treat him for Christmas. As beautiful as the hands of all house assistants who have not allowed the example of our poor politicians, corrupt ones, to teach them to steal from our homes left in their care. They walk to work! You are as beautiful as those who know that even to walk on land as gracefully as the giraffe, it is important for us to ask the land to accept us; making room for another, for we are not everything.

Keep the concrete away from the expansive land. Stop grabbing everything, it would not like to be yours. Let the House Girls' Nation flourish with law. You rot in power because of greed and you steal the beauty of my country by always hitting the headlines while women bow their heads in shame. Look up Mother and take pride in our new Motherland. Uncover your head and eyes; you have resisted, fought and endured. You had to endure much but bring your voice and beauty to the Okuyet; the council of the KalenjinKenya and speak there as you spoke in church. Take your voice to the meetings on local funds and ask about your road for

you have fallen, too many times fetching water on your back and cried scraping a shallow well. All of you who can, hold Hariri's hands and help her lift her feet to walk the land. Make her fly. She is strength.

We have never been known to lack strength in Kenya. We started by believing we were pulling together *Harambee*, only to wake up and find that some pulled out everything from our silos and our banks day and night.

I love you Kenya my country. You have plenty for your children. Even as I watch you get wasted by some who will not, and cannot embrace change and reform, I can lose myself in the wind for a while and tell you lovely things. Those who fly in, fall in love with your majesty and beauty. Right now, they fill the Maasai Mara- and wonder with the world! I see them lying in the sun at Kisauni and all along our coast. I love you like no one else can because I love you from your mud in my village, our people, our dust, our sweat and song to where the waters of the sea sparkle in sun. I know your weaknesses where they lie. They lie in leadership that is not passionate about you, about your people and our land. They lie in those who fear to lose because they took too much.

My phone beeps. We are just a few kilometers from Nairobi. It is De Gado. This is the message: *"Ope u r fine this festive season. I still think of the IDPS (Internally Displaced Persons). I continue to receive reports they are in dire need of support. Sun. 6.43 pm. 12/28/08."*

When can we build our nation out of mud and be at home with what we have? The next day I set out to the Camps where I had never been. De Gado holds my hand.

The children in the camps do not go to school. Free education for all benefits those who have homes and something to eat. You cannot resolve the problems of people who overnight turned into a label of your greed, IDPS, through charity or force. There is a deep wound here. It will always point to the year 2007. It is as old as land for lottery by the Brits. It is as old as Carrier Corps and Kariokor, it is as old as Operation Anvil. It is as old as Independence mistaken for Uhuru; freedom. It is as old as land grabbing by the new political elite. It is as old as Mathare and Kibera.

Join your sisters and brothers and beat your pans and make a loud noise in the nation. Beat your pots and break one big one; it is a traditional expression of anger that has not been appeased. Do

this at the entrance of State House! Talk in the language they understand. Make the noises you should make; sing the song of resistance; drive out this evil spirit in our politics. It is the spirit of death, greed; the spirit of strangling all that is good and silencing those who dare speak.

We stare at the anger on Ngong Hills every year at the spot where Kariuki lay when you killed him! We sit on top there and we ask for, and ask JM. We ask why they still dump dead people there. Facing Jeevanjee Gardens all over the country, we pray. We sit atop the hills at Koru and watch. And we speak. We ask for, and ask Ouko. We sit atop the Aberdares and ask for the Matiba we knew. We sit in the basin of the Rift Valley and ask for all peoples. Tell them Kipkarren waters are still bitter since Muge died. Tell them they are bitter since many souls had gone down there before. Tell them the rivers that flow from Mt. Kenya are all bitter waters. Tell them that the Tana and the Athi bleed. Tell them Mau Forest is bitter, tell them they carry the curse of naked women at Freedom Corner together with the curse of the NdoroboKenya because of a weed called *mathenge*, and the curse of the Endorois Kenya who suffer so quietly in the hot water springs that will burn all enemies bodies even if their rich enemies should be buried in state. The EndoroisKenya eventually win. The nation has a soul of change and Change must come. We cry on the streets for Mboya; and lay a wreath there outside the pharmacy every year. Kimaathi and Pinto; Kodhek is still litigating. We make our own nation. Pamoja. We tell De Gado's children to take heart, because silenced lips will shatter evil souls!

The wedding of marriage

There, at the bottom where the Bird of paradise plant raises its crane, where there is a clump of daisies and the plant called Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow which are continued by a low bush of bougainvillea that line the road, there at the beautiful place where Kenya is always waiting to marry Change; Kenya says she will. An Acacia looks up. And is glad. Baobabs look up and smile broadly in the wind. Their hair floats in all directions. Wattle trees are dancing. The fig tree and all trees of worship have local names everywhere. Use them.

Kenyalin, Nyakairu and Savaiva are singing to you.

Just come! You do not need special clothes to be here. Stay and be a partner in this marriage to Change. The witness is Change. Borrow a leaf from Grandmother Em. She wrapped up her tobacco in old dry banana fibre. It was beautiful in its beige and dark brown skin. Her little holder full of tobacco and rolled up cylindrically like a sweet with frilly wings on both sides looked like a little cheetah. It pounced and never looked back. It was a she cheetah.

Take a pinch of tobacco snuff from Grandmother Em and sneeze. Germs are better off free. I learn from the soil, the grass and the thoughts and voices of animals too. The histories and feelings of places which will remember you when people have lost their memories, and gone to space, teach me. Learn from them and Grandma En. She holds her time.

She remembers that history started with freedom, not colonialism. Before slavery there was freedom otherwise we would not have recognized freedom from Uhuru- independence. Afrika knew pain and fear before. But she was not pain and fear. 'Today's' Grandmas are fear. Children are fear. Yes, we have lost the freedom of migration from one village to the other, of safe evening walks under the stars

in search of beads for a wedding. But we shall sing wedding songs with cheer. We were not made only for tears!

I run across and hug Baba there, as he tells me he has just arrived from Manyani. I kiss the top of his bald head. My mother, Pita, Ghatt, Mut and Cherita hold my hands. Kenyalin, Hariri, Nyakairu, Umoja, Pamoja, Ang', Oko and De Gado are there.

I have run past the mark and we hold up a clean flag again. We walk down singing our freedom and we plant it at Freedom Corner. From inside Nyati House and the Nyayo Torture Chambers songs of victory come. Kenyans come from everywhere dressed in clean flags. The ones from Kisoi's village arrive first. The long distance runners men and women run carrying Kenyalin in the air as their flag. Jeevanjee, Kimaathi and Muindi Mbingu are clapping! We have broken prison bars. They carry the list of the disappeared Kenyans. Young Kenyans gone without a trace. We will not hide our wounds during our wedding. We will not use make up for cover up.

The old Parliament sinks as deep as the Mausoleum and someone puts corruption and greed into the hole. There is red soil, clay, black cotton soil and sandy soil to fill up the sunken hole. The Nyayo Monument is shaking and it goes down as new policemen clap. Nyati House is a living Nyati charging at the new Parliament but it misses the angle. The trees across at Freedom Corner begin to sing a new anthem. Mau Forest claps again. *Bunge la Mwananchi* and many little parliaments arise in every part of Kenya. Some MPS ride on donkeys. Some walk. I remember the Tanzanian minister's daughter at school singing to me that "*Mwalimu say cabe da, play your parti....*" I do not care how the peasants sang it but 'Mwalimu Julius Nyerere said it can be done. Play your part.' I know it is not going to be like entirely as Nyerere's style but the big divide between the rich and the poor, immoral divide too, must be filled with manure and all types of soils: red, clay, black cotton soil and sandy soil.

Every train, bus and *matatu* and not just the Kenya Airways plane must become national carriers. They, not only the ministers' have a small flag flapping in the wind; black on green, and black; our peace for us. The red is gone. White is in our minds and hearts. There is no euphoria but people at work and everyone know the one important thing for all of us. There is food, medicine and education. There is IT. Internet Technology. The strategic plans are in the red of our blood and in that of the Mother of Naivasha.

People can share ideas. Leaders listen to instructions. We cannot forget our real selves in the efficiency of IT.

The Ngong Hills are clapping. Koru and the spot outside the pharmacy on Moi Avenue where Mboya died are filled with longing souls. It is moving. Those who were children when this happened have turned up. They are the angriest. On Ngong Hills in the bush where Kariuki lay, the youth place our new mausoleums. It is not one. They are many. Kipakarren's mist slowly rises like incense from the incensor. Kimaathi's statue rises higher than the seated Kenyatta's and Kimaathi walks all over the land. Mathenge says he saw it all, before his spit kills that wretched plant. How can he leave it and it bears his name? Mount Kenya is capped with snow again. It freezes in place. The Mau forest speaks and the rivers are swelling.

The hot springs burn all the evil. The Endorois Kenya have won their case; their cattle walk. They carry plenty of milk in their udders. The song of the woman pastoralist booms in the Parliament of our own tongues that do not fight. The Exodus is over. I plant all hope in clumps. I see new trees. Some of the trees are called Atieno, Zainabu, Chepkoech, Anoopaa, Wangari and Peace. Girls are now named Jogu for elephant, they kept the memory, Twiga for giraffe, they saw far, let the ostrich remain a man, it hides its head, and that is why you have not heard Nyaga for a while. Kenyalin and Nyakairu lead them. Together we water the trees before the rain falls; to beat the drought! Beads of every color shimmer in the sun. It is daylight. I sit down outside the house. I am a bigger girl now. I see Kenya and Kenyalin dance. The grasshoppers begin to return. We are new.

De Gado, you will not rot in a bin. Speak now. Do not call Watukufu. The people win. Call them.

Epilogue

*Y*ou are new. I know you. I love you, Kenya. From your earth, your soil, I was created because it is your earth my parents ate. Yet still, I have to ask you if I can step on your soil today. If you can please accept me to walk on you here and there, for this I will always plead. My feet you see, are my heart! They love you. I feel your pain directly from the soil into my heart when I walk on you. And you have been hurt so many times.

They planted violence in you and violence grows with thorns of all types and viruses, human flesh eating things, which kill children too. Mother, I know you would not like to say no to my stepping on you, but I beg you still. I know so many walk on you without a care for your own feelings, even erecting monuments where you should be green. It is not true that once I call you my land I can do anything to you. I pass and go. You remain here. You are someone else's land. What matters right now is that you love me. That I may not be hated by the soil of any land on which I tread. All land is one, the islands joining it from down below.

Well, I know what my great grandparents ate grew from your soil in Afrika, but still I have to ask you even when am there, if I may put my foot on you. If I can make room for you, I surely can for all people. Whenever I lift up my foot on new land, please in your kindness and love, receive me Mother. I am never really a foreigner; am with you. My Mother, you are like me, the color of all of us is you, no matter what they say.

My toes speak to my head. You made my toes sensitive to you as if you knew, Earth Afrika Mother, that mine would be a long journey. My feet are all of me when I walk barefoot on you and we talk our own silent language of peace in a place where we do not fight because of color, faith or ethnic connections.

But I know you have been violated and so have I. When I come to a place where violence has been roughest I know it and I do a headstand. So, sometimes people are surprised to find me in so many places and sometimes, head down and feet up. I know you understand what no one else does. You knew that

sometimes I would be looking up to the stars for some heavenly dew from some places so far away. That I would look up wondering if the milky- way has some milk of reason for me to clean my feet. I know that I am you and you are me. So, when you burn, I burn. When you hurt, I hurt. I know when the heat is rising near you for your destruction my beloved Kenya, even before they tell me. I know how a mother knows about her child's temperature before her palm falls on its little forehead feeling for unusual rises and pauses of the rhythm of blood in the body. I can feel that you are not so well. Yet I love you more because you are daring. You dare, marry Change. I love you more.

On my cell-phone the time is 3.00am. I am not holding a religion in my hand to check the hour, just a cell phone to orient me. This is a June morning and it is cold here. I turn in my bed and close my eyes. The map of Kenya appears first vaguely on my mind. It has no in-land features but this shape I see is definitely hers. Burning borders. Red inside. It is not the red of wine or even Christmas. We are not in celebration. Inside burning borders she is a deep reddish brown color; angry red. Coffee red. It is a red which disturbs my mind. [...] *THE taste of INJUSTICE is BITTER. It KILLS THE MINDS AND SOULS of THE LIVING. How do we CLOSE CHAPTERS of THE PAIN of a NATION WITHOUT CLOSURE?* You are new. I know you. I love you, Kenya. From your earth, your soil, I was created because it is your earth my parents ate. Yet still, I have to ask you if I can step on your soil today. If you can please accept me to walk on you here and there, for this I will always plead. My feet you see, are my heart! They love you. I feel your pain directly from the soil into my heart when I walk on you. And you have been hurt so many times.



PHILO IKONYA is a Kenyan poet and novelist. She is known for speaking out against injustice and corruption. She has written extensively on governance, mass poverty and post-election violence in Kenya. She was arrested several times, and brutally in 2009, for speaking out. She is in exile in Norway since December 2009. She is an avid blogger and journalist. She has been a teacher, lecturer and editor. She speaks Kiswahili, English, Spanish, Norwegian and understands Italian and French. Philo Ikonya is the author of *THIS BREAD of Peace, Out of PRISON- Love SONG*, and *LEADING THE NIGHT*.



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